

Environment & Energy

Washington State Board Mandates Heat Pumps in All New Buildings

By Zach Bright

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- Heat pumps required as main heating source
 - Rule to take effect July 1 of next year
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Washington state has advanced first-in-the-nation rules that would require all new buildings to use electric heat pumps, which would give the state some of the country's strictest energy efficiency codes.

The State Building Code Council voted Nov. 4 to adopt a mandate setting heat pumps as the primary source of space and water heating. The rule is set to be finalized in January and take effect July 1, 2023.

The move is "an exciting step forward toward meeting our goal to reduce greenhouse gases in our state," according to Katy Sheehan, a member of the council who voted in favor of the electrification rules.

The state's latest data shows more than 23% of greenhouse gas emissions come from building heating and cooling, and lowering those emissions would help reach the state greenhouse gas reduction of 95% by 2050.

Washington statute also requires the state to increase building efficiency by 70% by 2031.

'Beginning of the End'

Opponents called the requirements premature and said they would drive up the cost of building new homes and could increase worries about energy reliability.

"This is the beginning of the end of the choice of natural gas usage for those residents of Washington," Republican state Sen. Lynda Wilson said ahead of the vote.

But proponents noted the climate concerns from state residents and local lawmakers, as well as the benefits to air quality that medical experts have emphasized.

The change was buoyed by building code funding opportunities in the federal tax and climate measure passed in August.

The measure set \$25 billion in tax credits, rebates and other incentives for building upgrades, including the High-Efficiency Electric Home Rebate program for electric systems and appliances and the Home Energy Performance-Based program for entire home energy efficiency upgrades.

The strengthened rules come after an 11-3 vote in April that required heat pumps to be used as the primary heat source in new commercial buildings and multifamily residences of four or more stories.

It also follows a push by the Biden administration to deploy electric heat pumps as a solution to high energy costs, enlisting companies like **Airbnb**, **Lyft**, and **Procter and Gamble** to spur production and installation of the energy-efficient heating systems.

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