As New York State public health, environmental health, patient advocacy, healthcare, nursing, and physician organizations, we declare burning fossil fuels in our buildings a significant climate and health risk. We call for immediate action to protect the health of New Yorkers and mitigate the current and future impacts of air pollution and climate change. Our organizations agree that:

⇒ Exposure to air pollution is now the greatest environmental health risk factor in the United States.
⇒ The research is clear: burning fossil fuels in buildings releases health-harming pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NOₓ) and fine particulate matter (PM₂.₅). Burning fuels in buildings pollutes the air both outside and inside our homes, and is an overlooked public health concern.
⇒ The health impacts of burning fossil fuels in our buildings demand immediate action.

Outdoor air pollution
  o NOₓ exposure is linked to respiratory diseases, particularly childhood asthma.
    ▪ New York’s buildings currently emit 43,000 tons of NOₓ pollution, more than buildings in any other state.
    ▪ Outdoors, NOₓ leads to the formation of ozone as well as PM₂.₅. Ozone (often called smog) pollution levels in New York consistently violate health-protective air quality standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Ozone exposure has been linked to increases in respiratory conditions and even premature mortality.
  o PM₂.₅ exposure is associated with dementia, decreased IQ in children, and poor pregnancy outcomes (stillbirth, preterm birth, and low-birth weight), with Black mothers especially at risk. Exposure to PM₂.₅ poses the highest risk to children, the elderly, and people who are pregnant and have other chronic conditions.
    ▪ Outdoor PM₂.₅ pollution from burning fuels in our buildings led to an estimated 1,300 early deaths in New York in 2017, which translates to roughly $14.4 billion in health impact costs in 2017.

Indoor air pollution
  o Gas stoves are a significant contributor to poor indoor air quality, emitting several pollutants such as PM₂.₅, NOₓ and deadly carbon monoxide (CO).
Pollution levels from everyday use of gas stoves often exceed the limits of outdoor air quality standards, and indoor concentrations are often much higher than health-protective guidelines set by the World Health Organization. Recent research strongly recommends complete elimination of gas stoves as even opening windows or running mechanical ventilation is not adequate in reducing gas stove pollution.

Children living in a home with a gas stove have a 42% increased risk of current asthma and a 24% increased risk of lifetime asthma.

The American Medical Association (AMA), the nation’s largest medical society, recognizes that cooking with a gas stove increases household air pollution and the risk of childhood asthma.

Harvard research shows that gas from stoves contains several chemical compounds, including benzene, a carcinogen for which there is no safe level of exposure.

⇒ New Yorkers at risk – including children, seniors, pregnant people, low-income communities, communities of color, Indigenous communities, people with disabilities and people with chronic disease – already bear some of the greatest economic, social and health burdens. For example, people of color and low-income residents tend to live in many of the hottest urban areas in New York City. Black New Yorkers are twice as likely to die from heat stress than other New Yorkers.

⇒ People of color in New York are exposed to 2.6 times as much outdoor PM$_{2.5}$ pollution from residential gas appliances as whites.

⇒ Several high poverty neighborhoods in the Bronx, where two-thirds or more of the residents are people of color, persistently have the highest rates of asthma-related morbidity compared to the rest of the state.

⇒ Low-carbon fuels, such as hydrogen and renewable natural gas, have a limited role to play in New York’s buildings.

⇒ Current methods of producing fossil-fuel derived hydrogen and feeding hydrogen into the fossil gas (also called “natural gas”) system pose health, safety and climate risks. This has been recognized by the AMA, who has resolved to advocate to government agencies and federal legislative bodies.

⇒ NO, emissions from burning green hydrogen are much higher than emissions from fossil gas, with research showing emission rates can be up to six times higher.

⇒ Strategies centered on low-carbon fuels will increase our reliance on fossil fuels – at a time where we need to be urgently focusing on healthy, cost-effective solutions.

⇒ New York State buildings already emit the most carbon pollution as compared to any other state, exacerbating climate change.

⇒ We call on decision makers in New York: the Climate Action Council, the New York Legislature, the Governor of New York, and City, County, and other local leaders to heed the clear scientific evidence and take steps now to reduce pollution from our buildings that drives climate change and harms health. These steps include:

⇒ Affirming the critical importance of meeting the emissions and equity goals of the Climate Act, which will help mitigate dangerous climate warming while delivering benefits of improving public health, economic opportunities, and quality of life for all New Yorkers;

⇒ Adopting policies that prioritize energy efficiency and electrification in buildings as the primary strategies to replace fossil fuel combustion, especially phasing in code requirements prohibiting on-site combustion of fossil fuels in new buildings over a 2024-2027 period;

⇒ Adopting zero-emissions appliance standards, while working with the relevant state agencies to ensure equitable and effective implementation of these rules;
Supporting a planning process to begin scaling down the utility gas system that maintains affordable, safe, and reliable utility service while protecting ratepayers, utility workers, and New Yorkers in the transition from fossil fuels; and

Maintaining limited use of low-carbon fuels given the health, safety, cost, and scaling constraints associated with their use in buildings.

New York’s public health, environmental health, patient advocacy, healthcare, nursing, physician, and medical communities are united in our effort to mitigate climate change and to protect the health of all New Yorkers from current and future climate and health impacts.

Signed:

Organizations
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
American Academy of Pediatrics New York State Chapter 1
American Academy of Pediatrics New York State Chapter 2
American Academy of Pediatrics New York State Chapter 3
Common Ground Health
Concerned Health Professionals of New York
Global Consortium on Climate and Health Education, Columbia University
Green & Healthy Homes Initiative
Moms for a Nontoxic New York
Mothers Out Front New York, Long Island
Mothers Out Front, Northern Westchester
New York Clinicians for Climate Action
New York State Public Health Association
Northeast New York Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health
Physicians for Social Responsibility New York

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