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All-Electric Building Code ramifications for residents, businesses discussed

By Vera Kochan



Gas appliances. A thing of the past? Photo A. Scheck

Aspects of the 2022 California Building Code, which was adopted by Contra Costa County, were up for discussion during the Moraga Town Council's April 12 meeting. While most of the amendments were related to life and safety, it was the All-Electric Building Code that seemed to take center stage during the evening.

In January of last year, the County Board of Supervisors amended the 2019 California Energy Code to require newly constructed buildings, such as residential (both single- and multi-family), detached Accessory Dwelling Units, hotels, offices, and retail to be all-electric. Restaurants are exempt.

According to the April 12 staff report by Moraga Associate Planner Mio Mendez and Planning Director Afshan Hamid, "An all-electric building is defined as a building that has no natural gas or propane plumbing installed within the building, and that uses electricity as the sole source of energy for its space heating (including heating of all indoor and outdoor spaces of the building),

water heating (including heating of indoor and outdoor pools and spas), cooking appliances, and clothes drying appliances. An all-electric building may utilize solar thermal pool heating."

Additionally, "The all-electric building code was adopted due to local climatic, geographical, topographical, and environmental conditions of Contra Costa County."

The County points out the many benefits of an all-electric new construction ordinance in that it would reduce greenhouse gas emissions that impact climate change and its hazards; reduce the expense of new building construction costs (piping and metering); further Contra Costa County's greenhouse gas emission goals; carry out the County Board of Supervisors' Climate Emergency Resolution No. 2020/256; and help improve safety and air quality.

California Senate Bill 350 requires that entities such as MCE and Pacific Gas and Electric must include contingency planning with regards to resource planning and load forecasting to carry customers through peak usage periods without interruption to service.

In an Aug. 31, 2022, Lamorinda Weekly article, "Health Benefits of Induction Cooking as Opposed to Gas Stove Tops Presented," San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility Board Member Dr. Marjaneh Moini explained some of the health risks involved with gas cooking in the home. Three types of emissions can be especially harmful. NO₂ (nitrogen dioxide) is a pollutant that can cause eye, nose and throat irritation when inhaled and can possibly decrease lung function by contributing to asthma, respiratory infections, and negative general cognitive functioning. CO (carbon monoxide) is harmful when breathed causing neurological effects and reduced overall cognitive functioning. PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ (particulate matter) also causes neurological effects; aggravates asthma and reduces lung function; and contributes to heart attacks and premature death. While these involve large scale doses, over time constant subjection can be harmful, especially to children, Moini said.

Contra Costa County Department of Conservation and Development Senior Planner Demian Hardman attended the April 12 council meeting to clarify any misconceptions or confusing points. With regards to the terminology of what constitutes a "new construction," Hardman explained that if the renovation is significant enough where 50% or more of the building is being modified or altered then the county considers it a new construction, and the all-electric code is enforced.

However, Mayor Renata Sos noted that "this does not affect my ability as a homeowner to swap out my gas appliances for new ones. That may change if the state says, 'No.' If the renovation is tantamount to new construction, it would apply.

"We have some local control here," Sos added. "We have the ability to act. We're nimble. We're flexible. We can do it. I am not a fan of making exceptions locally, or whether there should be exemptions."

The town council provided feedback to staff in order for them to develop an ordinance adopting the 2022 California Building Code either identically or similar to the County's all-electric building code.

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