MAJOR CLEAN AIR WIN FOR MENLO PARK AND BAY AREA

Menlo Spark Celebrates Bay Area Air District's Vote to Preserve Landmark Zero-Emission Water Heater Rule

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Menlo Park, CA – The Bay Air District Board of Directors voted today to adopt amendments to its zero-emission water heat rule, Appliance Rule 9-6, preserving the rule's core clean air protections. After a year and half of physicians, contractors, environmentalists, and public health leaders showing up to defend the rule against significant fossil fuel industry and realtor opposition, today's vote represents a major victory for clean air and public health across the Bay Area.

"This isn't just a win for our region's air quality, it's an important win for every city and county in the Bay Area, all of them are working on reducing our climate change impact and this will greatly help. Our lungs and our grandchildren will greatly appreciate this, and local governments can help with other steps to fight climate change." **– Brian Schmidt, Executive Director, Menlo Spark**

Originally adopted in 2023 to cut smog-forming nitrogen oxide (NOx) pollution, Rule 9-6 applies when a gas water heater breaks down or reaches the end of its useful life. It requires that the replacement be a heat pump. Importantly, **this rule does not require residents to replace functioning gas water heaters.**

The amendments passed by the Air District Board respond to concerns expressed over a transition from gas to electric and delay the rule's start date to January 2028 and establish exemptions for qualifying low-income properties and properties with significant electrical or space constraints.

Menlo Spark and allies have advocated for this rule at the regional level for years and welcome the vote as a major helper in helping our region electrify our buildings to improve public health and eliminate air pollution. The Air District is taking an important step for the Bay Area to

reduce harmful building pollution while making room to recognize the realities that some properties need additional time or flexibility to make the transition to electric.

What does this mean for residents?

Cleaner air and better health outcomes

Gas water heaters and furnaces release nitrogen oxides (NOx) pollution that causes 85 premature deaths and 15,000 asthma attacks a year, according to Air District estimates. NOx also causes smog and combines with other pollutants to form fine particulate matter (PM2.5), which harms lungs and hearts, especially in communities already facing high pollution. Gas appliance is Bay Area buildings emit more NOx than all of the region's passenger vehicles combined, making them a key contributor to smog.

Lower energy bills

Heat pump water heaters are much more efficient than gas models, making it so that switching to an electric heat pump can lower household energy bills. A recent RMI study estimates that 19 out of 20 Bay Area homes save money with a heat pump water heater, the average household saving about $360 a year, or $40 a month.

Advancing Local Climate Goals

Buildings produce over 40% of climate pollution in Menlo Park, mostly from burning methane in furnaces, water heaters, dryers and stoves. Cutting that pollution is essential to Menlo Park's Climate Action Plan goal of converting 95% of existing buildings to all-electric, and heat pump water heaters get the city there faster, even with a later start date. It also advances a goal of the Menlo Park Environmental Justice Element to reduce pollution exposure and improve air quality.

Menlo Spark has supported reach codes at the local level in Menlo Park and throughout the region. The Air District Rule helps Menlo Park and other cities achieve their climate and clean air goals, goals we have worked on for years. Menlo Spark was a crucial leader in the Air District decision in 2023 that first set this process in motion.

About Menlo Spark:

Menlo Spark is a nonprofit initiative that collaborates with the city government, businesses, and residents to ensure the success of the community’s efforts on climate and sustainability-related issues. By helping to weave together the network of projects and initiatives in the city that may contribute to sustainability, Menlo Spark supports a more unified strategy for progress towards the ultimate goal of climate neutrality.