2022 Sierra Club Washington Legislative Priority: Targeted Electrification
Talking Points and Background Facts for District Lobby Teams

What is “Targeted Electrification”?

As our state’s electricity grid moves towards being powered by 100% clean energy by 2045, we can utilize our grid to reduce our fastest growing source of climate pollution - emissions from fossil fuel use in buildings, including homes, schools and businesses.

This legislative session, lawmakers will consider a “Targeted Electrification” bill sponsored by Rep. Alex Ramel which clarifies that public utilities in Washington have the same legal authority that private utilities have to offer incentives to customers to switch to electric appliances.

This is one of several bills likely to be introduced this session designed to address climate pollution from the buildings sector - a necessary part of reaching our state’s legal commitment to reduce our emissions by 95% by 2050.

What would the bill do?

This bill clarifies that public utilities have the authority to develop and implement electrification programs that will benefit their customers. And it clarifies that when determining whether a program will benefit their customers, they’re allowed to consider critical factors such as indoor and outdoor air quality and the opportunity for greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

Why is that important?

Fairness, Consumer Choice, and Climate:

Currently, public utility customers that rely on wood stoves, heating oil, or gas furnaces are ineligible to receive assistance from their utility to upgrade to electric appliances, while investor-owned utilities like Puget Sound Energy would be free to help.

At the same time, those customers could receive generous incentives to acquire a new gas furnace.

This structure is unfair to both public utilities and their customers, limits customers’ ability to choose environmentally-friendly options, and provides a backwards incentive on climate -- in effect incentivizing the continued use of gas when we need to be moving away from fossil fuels to meet our climate goals.

What is our ask?

We want legislators to commit to supporting this bill once it’s introduced, and to help champion it in their caucus.

Why should we stop burning gas in our homes and buildings?
In Washington state, homes and buildings are the single fastest-growing source of carbon pollution, up 50 percent since 1990 -- and now cause 27% of Washington's climate pollution, more than the industrial sector. This largely comes from furnaces, water heaters, stoves and dryers that burned so-called "natural" gas. Gas primarily consists of methane - a greenhouse gas more than 80 times as potent as carbon dioxide - and a large majority of gas we use now comes from the environmentally destructive process of fracking. When methane leaks are taken into account, the full climate impact of fracked gas rivals that of coal, and a growing body of science shows that we need to immediately reduce gas consumption if we want to avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

Thanks to Washington state's abundance of clean, low-cost electricity, swapping out gas appliances for electric ones is a huge climate win, reducing the average household's climate footprint by 50% - the equivalent of completely giving up your car. Multiple studies, including the Washington State Department of Commerce's recently completed state energy strategy, have identified hooking buildings up to our increasingly clean electricity as the most cost-effective pathway to a decarbonized economy.

Gas also poses a significant threat to public safety due to the constant threat of pipeline explosions from the state's network of aging and leaky pipes and carbon monoxide poisoning in the home. Gas appliances also have well-documented impacts to indoor air quality and public health, contributing to higher rates of asthma in children.

**What else is happening this year on clean buildings in the legislature?**

Stakeholders are providing feedback to legislators and the Governor's office on several other bills related to climate emissions from the state buildings sector, and we anticipate being able to support most of those other policies. Additionally, there may be opportunities to win additional funding for efficiency and weatherization programs in the budget process.