

Ban on New Fossil Fuel Infrastructure



(Photo courtesy of Forbes)

With society's evolution, remnants of agricultural, architectural, technological, and transportation advancements have emitted tons of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, exponentially accelerating surface temperatures since the beginning of the post-industrial era. In 2018, prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, 89% of global greenhouse gas emissions were a symptom of fossil fuels. Fossil fuel sources include coal, oil, petroleum, tar, and other geologically limited material. Fossil fuels are responsible for two-thirds of the United States' sulfur dioxide emissions.

In July 2021, Washington State's Whatcom County became the first county to enact a ban on new fossil fuel infrastructure. Located in the northwest region of the state near the U.S.-Canada border, Whatcom County experiences air and water pollution from the region's two oil refineries. The negative impact of the oil refineries on the region's fishing and orca populations led to the unanimous vote to ban any new refineries, coal-fired power plants and other fossil-fuel-related infrastructure. The ordinance also calls for mitigation of any greenhouse gasses emitted by fossil fuel facilities through projects implemented outside the region, or by purchasing offsets "from any carbon registry approved by the Planning Department, [Northwest clean Air Agency] NWCAA, or any Washington state agency."

The ordinance, the first in the nation, is a powerful example of how the U.S. can speed up the transition to cleaner energy sources. It was driven by the increasing awareness by county residents of the impacts of global warming, which negatively affected salmon runs, increased wildfires and caused unprecedented heat waves.

Canada has also taken steps to reduce reliance on fossil fuels by eliminating oil-powered heating in infrastructure. The primary objective is to replace fossil fuel burning with electric heating, as buildings are a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions. Banning fossil fuel heating helps cut

emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas emitted during the production of fossil fuels. Electric heating, particularly by heat pumps, is the primary replacement for fossil fuel combustion. These bans are being implemented in various countries, especially in Europe, to reduce reliance on imported gas and achieve strategic energy security. The natural gas industry opposes these bans, seeing them as a threat to its market and growth. While the bans effectively eliminate fossil fuel burning in new buildings, further policies and support are needed to electrify existing buildings and encourage retrofitting. Overall, these bans are an important step, but more actions are required to fully decarbonize cities and achieve net-zero goals.

Resources and References

- ClientEarth. [Fossil fuels and climate change: the facts](#). February 18 2022
- Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). [Fossil Fuels: The Dirty Facts](#). June 1 2022
- Milman, Oliver. [Washington state county is first in US to ban new fossil fuel infrastructure](#). The Guardian, July 28 2021
- Whatcom County, Wash. [Ordinance](#)
- CBC. [Why oil and gas heating bans for new homes are a growing trend](#)

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This document is intended to introduce a concept and inspire further research. While we strive for accuracy, this brief does not encompass the full spectrum of data and perspectives related to the topic. Readers are encouraged to seek additional information and expert guidance.

