

Submitter: Ann Turner

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure: SB868

“Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Ann Turner. I am retired physician, retired from a career in community medicine, working with vulnerable populations. As a member of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility and St. Andrew Ecojustice Team, I advocate for policies that will mitigate the devastating impacts of the climate crisis. I strongly support SB’s 868, 869, 870, and 871, legislation that will improve climate resilience.

As a physician, I worked with migrant and seasonal farmworkers, workers at great risk from many of the devastating impacts of climate change—extreme heat and poor air quality from wildfire smoke as well as drought and flooding.

Homes and buildings are the second largest source of carbon emissions in Oregon, primarily from burning methane or so-called “natural gas.” As a physician, I am concerned about the health impacts of methane which not only warms the planet but pollutes the air we breathe. The World Health Organization and the editors of more than 200 peer-reviewed medical journals have declared that climate is the single greatest threat to human health. Methane is 86 times better at trapping heat than carbon dioxide and accounts for about 30% of global warming, according to the International Energy Agency. Methane leaks into the atmosphere at rates about double those reported and does this at every point along the supply chain from extraction by fracking, pipelines, power plants, transport and from the pipes in homes and buildings.

Burning methane in our homes emits the air pollutants emitted by car exhaust—nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and formaldehyde. The American Medical Association, several State Medical Societies, and the American Public Health Association have policies calling out the health harms of gas stoves burning methane. The scientific evidence is clear that combustion of “natural gas” emits nitrogen dioxide, increasing the risk of childhood asthma by 42% and accounting for at least 12% of all cases of childhood asthma in the U.S. This is equivalent to the impact of secondhand smoke in homes.

Methane itself, “leaked” into our homes, has been found to contain numerous hazardous air pollutants, include benzene for which, according to the EPA, there are no safe levels. Even at very low levels, exposure to benzene is associated with blood cancers like leukemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma.

The health impacts of burning methane is greater in low income and minority communities who are more likely to live in smaller spaces with older appliances, poor ventilation and a greater likelihood of poor ambient air quality.

These bills improve climate resilience for all Oregonians and especially address the issue of environmental justice by making home weatherization and heat pumps available to low income Oregonians. This will provide affordable heat in the winter and cooling in the summer. Electrifying current homes and buildings and building new homes and buildings all electric moves Oregon toward a low carbon future and supports Oregon's goals of lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Thank you for allowing me to comment.

Ann Turner, MD  
Portland, Oregon 97211  
Member Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility