

Deconstructing Gas Industry Propaganda

What does the gas industry want you to believe? And what is the truth?

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by Climate and Community Project

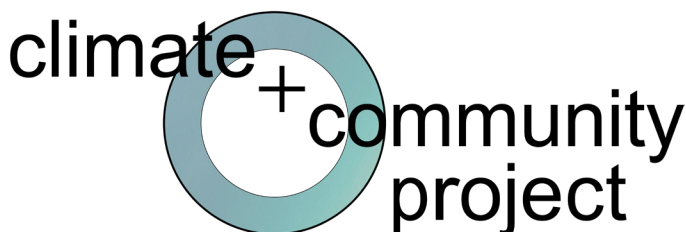
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What is gas industry propaganda?

- Gas is a huge industry. It encompasses companies that extract gas (e.g. through drilling or hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking), companies that refine gas, companies that transport gas over large distances, and companies that deliver gas to customers.
- Each component of the gas industry engages in propaganda and lobbying to secure its business, like placing [advertisements](#) that masquerade as journalism in major newspapers or attempting to plant pro-gas [propaganda booklets](#) for school children.
- Sometimes, the gas industry also uses [front groups](#), or organizations with “neutral” names that obscure that they are run by gas companies, like “Californians for Balanced Energy Solutions” or “Partners for Energy Progress,” to engage in propaganda.
- Gas industry propaganda is a lot like [tobacco propaganda](#): the gas industry can see that its profits are threatened, and is turning to propaganda and downplaying public health science to maintain its profits.

Why does the gas industry use propaganda on its residential customers?

- Gas utilities need residential customers to make money. Growing momentum to transition homes off of gas threatens gas utilities’ profitability.
- Utilities want to sustain and grow demand for gas. The profit that a gas utility makes is generally based on a combination of [two things](#): (1) sales (the more gas it sells, the more utility shareholders earn) and (2) capital expenses (as a gas utility builds infrastructure like pipelines or refineries, a state regulator authorizes it to earn a return on its investments).
- Sometimes, gas utilities will even take the money that you give them through your bill payments and [spend](#) it on public relations and lobbying activities with the intention of growing their gas business.
- In addition to the propaganda below, gas utilities will sometimes offer new free or very low-cost gas appliances to make sure that residences are “locked in” to gas for the duration of the appliance’s lifetime.



What does gas propaganda lie about?

Gas propaganda directed at residents often centers around 3 themes: cooking quality, reliability, and cleanliness.

Cooking quality:

Gas industry trade associations have spent [hundreds of thousands of dollars](#) on sponsored Instagram influencer posts promoting gas cooking as a cooking option that's quicker and "makes food taste better" that target millennials and young families, building on [many decades](#) of gas industry advertisement that positions gas cooking as better.

The truth:

There's no reason that gas cooking might be "better" than electric. In fact, lab tests of cooking ranges find that electric induction stoves are often [faster and more efficient](#) than gas ranges. Of course, cooking on a new appliance [requires some adjustments](#)—for instance, you may need to replace some aluminum or copper pots and pans to make sure they're compatible with an induction stove.

Ultimately, these intensifying efforts to promote gas cooking are not about making you a better home cook. They exist to [distract](#) from evidence on the detrimental public health impacts of gas in homes. Public health researchers have [found](#) that cooking with gas releases nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and other pollutants that cause respiratory complications and lead to worse asthma for children and adults; electric stoves do not release those same pollutants. Because of the prevalence of gas leaks in homes, gas stoves can release [pollutants](#) even when turned off. When an affordable housing building in New York transitioned 10 apartments from gas to electric cooking, they [found](#) a significant reduction in NO₂, carbon monoxide, and other pollutants.

Reliability:

The gas industry also promotes gas propaganda by claiming that gas appliances are always running and are unaffected by events that cause electric power outages, like storms.

The truth:

Gas appliances are actually not all that reliable in a power outage, because [most of them](#) depend on electricity to run (most gas furnaces and water heaters do not work in an outage, and gas stoves may or may not work depending on the model). Also, gas really isn't that reliable itself during extreme weather events: storms and deep freezes in the [Northeast US](#) and [Texas](#) have halted gas production with deadly effects. Making the electric power system more reliable is an important concern, but increasing our reliance on gas won't make homes any more reliable.

"Clean" gas:

The gas industry has always tried to greenwash gas as a "clean" fuel. Even the phrase "natural gas" [provides a marketing advantage](#) for the industry; when compared to more accurate phrases like "methane gas" or "fossil gas", "natural" seems healthier and cleaner. Increasingly, gas companies will [advertize](#) their products as "safe, clean, and renewable."

The truth:

The vast majority of gas that arrives at your home comes from fossil fuels, which are not renewable sources. Gas companies will make claims about their product being "renewable" because some of them source a very small amount of gas from the [methane produced by landfills](#). This small amount of gas is still just as harmful as fossil fuel gas. Methane, no matter its source, contributes the same environmental and health risks for households. **No matter how it's sourced or how it's presented in advertisements, gas is never a "clean" energy source.**

What's the alternative?

- If you cook with gas, using a stove range hood and other forms of ventilation can reduce your exposure to harmful pollutants from cooking with gas, though ultimately gas cooking will always require [more ventilation](#) than electric cooking.
- If you're about to replace your gas stove, you can consider installing an electric induction stove instead (these are electric stoves with a smooth surface of burners, and can be easier to cook with than the older electric stoves with coil burners).
- Renters and homeowners who are not able to replace their gas stove might choose to use a [portable induction cooktop](#) when they can.
- If you need to replace your space or water heater, you can likely access rebates and incentives to make electric space or water heating an affordable option, particularly if you own your home.
- Some of these issues—like reliability and how clean our fuels are—go beyond the choices we make at home, which is why building out renewable energy sources like wind and solar, and investing more in making the electric grid resilient to extreme weather and other disruptions, is important in every state.