

The Green Police Are Coming for New York Pizza

Environmental activists expect us to modify our lifestyles to meet their priorities.

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When I lived in New York City my favorite pizzeria was [Arturo's](#), on Houston Street. Coal-fired ovens made for a charred crust you could use to sop up sauce from an order of mussels. But joints like that are at risk as the city's environmental regulators propose mandatory 75 percent reductions in emissions by restaurants that use traditional fuels in their cooking and baking—a goal many restaurant owners consider unachievable. The rule isn't finalized, and it contains caveats that savvy business owners could use as a lifeline. But it's the latest sign that environmental activists expect us to modify our lifestyles to meet their green priorities.

"The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP or the Department) is promulgating rules that would establish requirements for control devices to reduce emissions from cook stoves at restaurants in existence prior to May 6, 2016," reads the city regulatory agency's [announcement](#) of a July 27 public hearing. "The proposed rule provides that the operators of cook stoves that were installed prior to May 6, 2016 must hire a professional engineer or registered architect to assess the feasibility of installing emission controls on the cook stove to achieve a 75% reduction in particulate emissions. If this assessment concludes that a reduction of 75% or more cannot be achieved, or that no emissions controls can be installed, the assessment must identify any emission controls that could provide a reduction of at least 25% or an explanation for why no emission controls can be installed."

The rule also specifies that "Cook stove means any wood fired or anthracite coal fired appliance used [primarily for cooking food for onsite consumption at a food service establishment...] for the preparation of food intended for onsite consumption or retail purchase."

War on Pizza

To most people, this sounds annoying and intrusive if very particular to old-school cookery. To New Yorkers in particular, though, it's a declaration of war against pizza.

"If you fuck around with the temperature in the oven you change the taste. That pipe, that chimney, it's that size to create the perfect updraft, keeps the temp perfect, it's an art as much as a science. You take away the char, the thing that makes the pizza taste great, you kill it," an anonymous restaurant owner who relies on a coal-fired oven [told](#) the *New York Post*.

The allowance in the proposed rule for feasibility assessments means that existing restaurants *might* escape enforcement. That's a potential lifesaver, since \$20,000 plus ongoing maintenance costs is the price tag for compliance [cited](#) by at least two [restaurateurs](#). Businesses will have to shoulder all expenses for meeting the requirements of the proposed rule.

"You know how many pizzas I have to sell to pay for that \$20,000 oven?" pizzeria owner Joe Calcagno [complained](#) to CBS News.

Ovens installed since 2016 are already subject to restrictive rules, meaning that you're unlikely to see traditional fuels used in new installations. That means existing restaurants with wood- and coal-fired ovens will be it, dwindling in number as the years pass with inevitable attrition.

If this sounds familiar, that's because demands that we all change the way we live our lives, our preferences be damned, have become increasingly common.

Your Gas Stove is Next

"In May, the Democrat-controlled New York State Legislature and Gov. Kathy Hochul inked a \$229 billion state budget agreement that included a ban on residential gas stoves. By 2029, only electric ranges will be allowed in new residences," *Reason's* Christian Britschgi [reports](#) in the August/September issue. "The policy is similar to bans imposed by local governments in places such as New York City and California. Advocates say those laws help curtail climate change by reducing natural gas consumption and protect people's health by reducing in-home emissions."

This comes after [huffy](#) initial [denials](#) that anybody wanted to ban popular gas stoves, which are [preferred by many chefs](#) as well as home cooks for their quick and reliable heat. Sixty-nine percent of respondents to a recent Harvard CAPS Harris [poll](#) opposed "governmental rules that would virtually eliminate gas stoves from kitchens." Then there's the bypassed discussion about the wisdom of eliminating alternatives to electric appliances and [expanding reliance](#) on a power grid that's already [overburdened and rickety](#).

"The U.S. power system is faltering just as millions of Americans are becoming more dependent on it—not just to light their homes, but increasingly to work remotely, charge their phones and cars, and cook their food—as more modern conveniences become electrified," *The Wall Street Journal* [warned](#) last year.

But politicians pretty quickly went from denying that gas bans were in the works to

embracing them and insisting that they're a great idea.

"There are clean energy alternatives," New York Governor Kathy Hochul [said](#) in May after her state [banned natural gas](#) in new buildings starting in 2026. "It's going to take time and I want to make sure that New Yorkers don't get hit hard for the costs, so we're going to roll this out. But new buildings that are going up, they can go electric, they can do heat pumps."

Take a Vacation While You Can

By the same token, travelers enjoying flights to tourist destinations after the disruptions of the pandemic might want to enjoy their trips while they can. "[Sustainability](#)" is the hot topic at this year's Paris Air Show, which means non-stop discussions about reducing the environmental impact of travel. That means conversations about increased efficiency and new fuels, but that's not enough for everybody.

"In the end, the decarbonisation of air travel will only happen through a reduction in air travel overall," Jérôme Du Boucher, aviation specialist for the NGO Transport & Environment, [told France24](#).

That's not just the musings of a lone activist; it's a [serious proposal](#) in [certain circles](#) and a [recommendation](#) by France's Agency for Ecological Transition. That government body proposes hiking ticket prices with taxes or capping flights to reduce air travel. Never mind that "flying has gotten considerably cheaper, safer, faster and even greener, over the last 60 years," according to a [2017 article](#) by the University of Texas at Austin. "Today's aircraft use roughly 80 percent less fuel per passenger-mile than the first jets of the 1950s." Further innovation seems more promising than reserving air travel for the wealthy and well-connected, but that's not the world in which we live.

No, the world in which we live is one in which governments polish their green credentials by banning decent stoves even as they [close nuclear power plants](#) that could *really* reduce emissions. It's one in which choice and personal preferences matter less than top-down dictates. It's one in which you should enjoy pizza made in a coal- or wood-fired oven now, because it may soon be a thing of the past.

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