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Renewable natural gas is not a climate solution

Electrification is a fast and less costly means of reducing emissions

Dear Editor:

FortisBC is promoting the use of biomethane (“Renewable Natural Gas”) and carbon-based hydrogen in our homes as a climate solution. But using these so-called “renewable gases” in buildings in place of fracked natural gas will not lower emissions, nor will it improve indoor air quality. And it will increase costs for gas customers.

Biomethane, like natural gas, is made mostly of methane, a greenhouse gas 85 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

Methane is known to leak from pipes, so adding biomethane to natural gas pipelines will result in more methane escaping into the atmosphere, further warming our planet.

Not only does biomethane negatively affect the climate, but it can also degrade indoor air quality. Recent studies have found that methane leaks from natural gas furnaces and appliances, and when gas cook stoves are in use, health-damaging air pollutants are released into homes and can trigger respiratory diseases.

Biomethane is produced by breaking down bio-waste from landfills, farms, and wastewater facilities. While this sounds good in theory, there are a limited number of these sources, and expensive infrastructure would need to be built to convert bio-waste into biomethane and transport it throughout B.C. Under current legislation, FortisBC is authorized to recover such costs from their ratepayers; we the customers will foot the bill.

The BC Renewable and Low-Carbon Gas Supply Potential Study shows that B.C. can only produce enough biomethane to displace about four per cent of the province’s current gas consumption.

FortisBC proposes to address the shortfall by purchasing biomethane from other provinces and the U.S., and hydrogen produced from natural gas using expensive and unproven technologies.

Given the climate emergency our communities are grappling with, we don’t have time to follow FortisBC’s diversified carbon-based approach. Electrification is the fastest, and a less costly, means of reducing our collective emissions.

We commend FortisBC for constructing electric vehicle charging stations throughout our region. However, we urge them to also apply this electrification lens to home energy.

The \$270 million budgeted for the Okanagan Capacity Upgrade could be better spent supplying electricity to new homes, supporting energy retrofits in existing rental and low-income housing, or building community solar projects.

Sue Kirschmann, First Things First Okanagan, Naramata