

Environmentalists Are Destroying My Kitchen

Despite the New York Times' gaslighting, bureaucrats and politicians are coming for your stoves.

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My New York City apartment doesn't have a lot going for it. It's 700 square feet. The master bedroom fits little more than a queen-sized bed. There's no kitchen pantry. My baby son sleeps in a large closet. But I'm a cook, and it does have at least one thing that keeps me renewing the lease year after year: a four-burner gas stove.

Gas ranges allow cooks a greater degree of control over heat, from which flavor and texture result. But for the next generation of New York cooks, that feature will be even more of a rarity.

Starting this year, gas stove hookups will be banned in newly constructed buildings under seven stories throughout the five boroughs. The 90-year-old brownstone I live in, which was renovated and divided into four units in 2019, will be grandfathered in. Starting in 2027, this regulation will also apply to taller buildings. Inspired by city regulators, state lawmakers passed a similar ban in May. Now, New Yorkers who like high-heat and precise temperature control will be out of luck regardless of whether they live in Buffalo or Bushwick.

Over on the Left Coast, Berkeley adopted a similar ban in 2019, which was overturned by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals this April. More than 50 other California cities, from Los Angeles to Sacramento, have adopted copycat regulations over the last five years which are now in legal limbo. Then in January, the feds got on board: Consumer Product Safety Commissioner **Richard L. Trumka Jr.** called gas stoves "a hidden hazard" and made noises about possibly banning them, saying—ominously, to libertarian ears—"products that can't be made safe can be banned."

Under the guise of environmentalism, big government types keep coming for our kitchens—from gas stoves to dishwashers. Even our pizza ovens are under siege.

It's the same story every time, with endless permutations: Environmentalists pick a product to ban, use questionable evidence to justify their onslaught or misunderstand how people's behavior will shift if their tools are made worse, and leave the rest of us to suffer the consequences—peppering our lives with additional low-grade annoyances.

What today's environmentalists fail to realize is that people will change their purchasing behavior as it becomes easier and cheaper to do so, that the products they seek to impose will, in many cases, inevitably become part of the marketplace if they're good enough.

In the meantime, they've made our kitchens and cooking worse, with no real effect beyond annoyance and cost increases.

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"No one is coming for your gas stove anytime soon," [reassured](#) a headline in *The New York Times* back in January, after the fracas that ensued in response to Trumka's comments. "Switching from gas to electric stoves is seen as good for the environment—which has inspired a conservative backlash," reads the subhead, which somehow pins the blame on conservatives.

The CPSC quickly came to Trumka's defense, citing how the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and World Health Organization had deemed the levels of nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide released by gas stoves unsafe. As evidence, it offered a new study that attributed 13 percent of childhood asthma cases to gas stoves.

Just one problem: The study was terribly flawed.

[It was not](#) full of new findings or bolstered by new and better methodology, but rather a review of existing literature on the topic. It used excess asthma risk calculations from those studies and an estimate of the number of homes in the U.S. with gas stoves in them to calculate how many childhood asthma cases are caused by gas stoves (12.7 percent, they claim). It was funded by the environmentalist group Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), which seeks to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030. Study co-author Brady Seals is part of RMI's carbon-free buildings initiative—a conflict of interest that makes clear where RMI stands on the matter of eliminating gas stoves from people's homes.

In order for that number to hold up, you have to accept that gas stoves are a significant contributor to the development of childhood asthma. But there's a lot of noise in the data: Namely, that households that own gas stoves tend to look different than households that don't, and that there are a lot of uncontrolled variables which distort the confidence with which we should believe RMI's estimate.

Trumka, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, who [jumped to his aid](#), and Democratic senators like **Cory Booker**, who adopted this as a cause du jour by adding a [racial justice sheen](#) to it, ignore that some 35 percent of Americans use gas stoves *because they want to*. Gas tends to be cheaper than electric. Most home chefs—not to mention nearly all professionals—despise electric stoves for good reason; they take more time to initially heat up and are slower to respond when heat is ratcheted up or down. Searing a scallop or caramelizing onions is far more difficult with a suboptimal appliance, and even with practiced technique the results are likely to taste worse.

But it's not just stoves that today's big government types seek to banish to the ash heap of

(appliance) history.

“The dishwashers, they had a little problem,” **President Donald Trump** said while [campaigning in Nevada](#) back in 2020. “They didn’t give enough water, so people would run them 10 times, so they end up using more water,” he added, correctly identifying the core problem, if exaggerating the magnitude.

“We’re looking very strongly at sinks and showers and other elements of bathrooms, where you turn the faucet on in areas where there’s tremendous amounts of water, where it all flows out to sea because you could never handle it all, and you don’t get any water,” Trump had [said](#) the year prior. People “take a shower and water comes dripping out, very quietly dripping out. People are flushing toilets 10 times, 15 times, as opposed to once; they end up using more water. So EPA is looking very strongly at that, at my suggestion.”

“Since 1994, federal law has capped flow from a shower head to 2.5 gallons of water per minute,” [reported](#) *The Washington Post*. “After manufacturers started producing more luxurious shower fixtures with more than one nozzle, the Obama administration amended the rule so that the same limit applied to the entire fixture.” The Energy Department under Trump revoked that rule, allowing multiple nozzles, but did not make the case for why the federal government should be concerning itself with such consumer choice matters in the first place.

Though Trump might be incorrect that people are flushing their toilets 15 times in a row to achieve a shiny clean bowl, he’s directionally correct, bringing attention to the fact that efficiency standards—which have been ratcheted up in recent years—frequently end up being anything but. “‘Efficiency’ has become a euphemism to laud an appliance that uses fewer inputs relative to its outputs rather than shorthand for doing the job as effectively as possible,” [wrote](#) *National Review*’s Noah Rothman.

“When a new energy standard is adopted by the DOE, the result is an increase in dishwasher cycle time,” [reads a report](#) by the free market Competitive Enterprise Institute. “Of the current 177 models reviewed by *ConsumerReports.org*, the fastest cycle time was the Frigidaire model FBD2400KS at 90 minutes. This is not due to consumer choice, but because it is not technologically feasible to create dishwashers that both meet the current standards and have cycle times of one hour or less.” (Some dishwashers have shorter cycles, running at about 60 minutes, which can rinse glass but don’t really get the job done when confronted with tougher grease and grime.)

“Manufacturers have met these [energy efficiency] standards by having machines recirculate less water throughout a longer wash cycle,” [wrote](#) *Reason*’s Christian Britschgi.

But another unintended consequence of the war on dishwashers is that people, when faced with less effective dishwashers, spend more time prewashing their dishes, or end up handwashing them altogether, which uses somewhere between three and five times the amount of water that would have been used by the appliance. As for the showerheads, people predictably report taking longer showers when the water pressure is worse.

Granholm [said in May](#), when announcing tightened emissions standards for vending machines, dishwashers, and electric motors, that consumers can expect to save more than \$650 million in water and energy bills as a result of the administration’s push to force

tighter standards on appliance makers. But if it were so self-evidently money-saving, wouldn't manufacturers have already moved in that direction? Do we really need Granholm and other federal bureaucrats to tell us how to wash our dishes and hair?

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It's not just the large appliances. Little things that make people's lives better, tastier, and less tedious are being cracked down on by big government types in federal and state governments.

Activists in Washington, D.C., have succeeded at getting the city council to crack down on gas-powered leaf blowers. People who actually use such equipment, like low-paid supers tasked with keeping outside areas of apartment buildings clean, say battery-powered alternatives make it harder for them to get their jobs done; gas is still the best in the game. San Francisco led the nation in banning single-use plastic bags back in 2007; now, nine states—California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Colorado—have outright bans on the grocery-store staples which are cheap to make, light to transport, and can impressively hold more than 1,000 times their own weight. Though environmentalists claim these "[urban tumbleweeds](#)" are clogging up streets and storm drains, polluting oceans and harming wildlife, [most reliable studies indicate](#) they comprise a very small percentage of overall litter—besides, most users attest to the fact that they simply do the job way better than existing alternatives, unmatched in convenience. ("Paper bags from the grocery store fucking suck," [complained](#) one person who would ostensibly be in support of such environmental regulations on r/ZeroWaste.) And where plastic bag bans have gone, plastic straw bans have soon followed: Oregon, Colorado, and New York have all banned the turtle-killers, leaving consumers stuck with paper straws that disintegrate mid-drink. It all amounts to what *National Review's* Noah Rothman [has appropriately termed](#) "the war on things that work."

It's a bit ironic that the environmentalist left has chosen to fight a battle against the tools that allow food to be made and enjoyed. Their efforts amount to a concerted attack on culinary pleasure, especially that which is produced at home.

High-end food world, after all, suffers no delusions that it's the province of conservatives; most food writers are avowed liberals and most food sites assume they're speaking to—and policing—their good progressive ilk. "I'm a vegan landlord," [read](#) one *Bon Appetit* headline from earlier this year, "and I banned my tenants from cooking meat." Food columnist J. Kenji López-Alt recently [reflected](#) in *The New Yorker* about "kitchen-bro culture," and beloved recipe writer Alison Roman had her column placed on "temporary leave" by *The New York Times* after making purportedly tone-deaf remarks about Chrissy Teigen and Marie Kondo, two minority women. (Roman was never given the opportunity to revive her column at the *Times*, but has since migrated to Substack.) The Gimlet Media podcast Reply All, which attempted to chronicle the workplace abuses from on high at *Bon Appetit*—commenting on toxic leadership within kitchen culture more broadly—ended up an ouroboros eating its own tail after its hosts were ousted for...allegedly fostering a toxic workplace and opposing union demands.

At high-end restaurants around Manhattan and Brooklyn, where I live, it is not uncommon to see menu copy referencing extra charges explicitly added to the bill to pay employees a "living wage" or so that the restaurant can provide health care to their staff; Astor Wines, where I order most of my liquor, touts that it's "worker-owned"; even posh Eleven Madison

Park—which boasts a price tag of \$365 for its multicourse menu—[went plant-based](#) back in 2022. The food world is frequently consumed by discussing the ethics of using animal products, the ethics of factory farming, the ethics of chefs de cuisine berating sauciers in pursuit of excellence (or at least uniformity).

But leftists, who seem to want ever-present access to not only good restaurant food, but the means of (at-home) production, don't seem to grok that these goals are in tension with another goal: remaking the main site of energy use and production in the home—the kitchen. The two can't coexist, at least not in their present form, and home cooks like myself grow bitter when our tools are taken away before our budgets allow us to replace them with better alternatives.

Consider, for example, induction cooktops, which use electromagnets (not fossil fuels) and result in faster heating times than their electric counterparts. Many users report lower energy bills when compared with gas and electric, not to mention the compounding fact that induction doesn't heat up the rest of the kitchen when in use. But the catch, at least at present, is that they require entirely retrofitting your kitchen—you need special cookware in order to cook with induction, and the models themselves remain expensive enough to be out of reach for many.

Many European households and eateries—comprising [35.9 percent](#) of the total market share worldwide—have switched to induction stoves, with American [professional chefs](#) like Le Bernardin's Eric Ripert following suit. The tech is increasingly [favored](#) by developers of [luxury buildings](#) in places like New York that have banned gas.

This is the story, after all, of so much technological advancement: A new innovation is adopted first by the well-off, then the rest. Competition drives prices down. Demand increases, so more makers enter the space. Eventually, the superior technology wins out, and the stockings become accessible even to factory girls (to use a [Schumpeterism](#)).

In June, the *New York Post* [reported](#) that the New York City Department of Environmental Protection was drafting new rules that would force city pizzerias, which frequently use coal-burning pizza ovens, to slash carbon emissions by 75 percent. "This is an unfunded mandate and it's going to cost us a fortune not to mention ruining the taste of the pizza totally destroying the product," one angry restaurateur [told](#) the *Post*.

Though only a few dozen establishments are affected by this mandate, many pizzeria owners were hit hard by both the first (March 2020) and second (December 2020) rounds of COVID orders, which barred them from allowing indoor dining; they certainly don't have excess funds lying around to retrofit their kitchens.

When they ban the products you enjoy using, big government types are forcing you to accept worse-quality goods, telling you it's time to take one for the team. Your sacrifice theoretically results in deliverance from environmental horrors. But it doesn't really work that way in practice because big government types so frequently fail to factor in the unintended consequences of their actions.

Despite the *New York Times'* gaslighting, people *are* coming for your stoves. And they're also coming for your dishwasher, your showerhead, your leaf blower, and your plastic straws. No single crusade is enough to get most people fired up, but each makes life a little worse and a little more expensive, in pursuit of ever-elusive environmental goals.

Environmentalists would be wise to let people make their own decisions instead, as a matter of principle and as a matter of pragmatism, since people so frequently end up doing good—just on their own timeline.

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