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New York City, Environmental Groups and Northeast States Challenge Weak Energy Standards for Home Heating Appliances

Despite surging fuel prices, DOE defends wasteful standards

New York, NY (January 17, 2008) – Environmental advocates and state and city governments are filing lawsuits today urging the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to adopt stronger energy efficiency standards for residential furnaces and boilers.

The public interest law firm Earthjustice is filing suit on behalf of Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), arguing that standards DOE adopted in November are shockingly weak, will cost consumers billions of dollars and fail to reduce global warming emissions.

The City of New York and the States of Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York are also challenging DOE's standards in a joint lawsuit being filed today.

“Stronger energy efficiency standards for furnaces and boilers would save money, stop pollution and spare health,” said Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal. “The Bush Administration’s stagnant standards disregard the law and public interest, benefiting industry at the expense of consumers and the environment. Without increased fuel efficiency, consumers nationwide will unnecessarily spend potentially millions more in home heating costs, while their furnaces and boilers spew millions more tons of harmful CO2.”

Tougher efficiency standards translate into significant economic benefits, especially in northern states where the cost difference between low and high efficiency models can be recovered more quickly through reduced heating bills. Advocates for residents in these regions said the weak national standards disproportionately hurt renters who are stuck paying the higher fuel costs of less efficient models installed by landlords.

"By adopting such weak new standards, the Energy Department is telling New Yorkers and others that reducing greenhouse gases and heating bills just doesn't matter," said Ramin Pejan, attorney at the New York City Law Department. "The success of the City's PlaNYC efforts to improve air quality in a cost-effective manner depends, in part, on cooperation from federal agencies."

The new DOE standards for gas-fired furnaces - the most common home heating appliance - represent a miniscule increase: from 78 to 80 percent efficiency. DOE recognized that adopting a 90 percent efficiency standard nationwide would maximize consumer value, saving \$11 billion over a 24-year period, while also preventing the emission of 141 million tons of carbon dioxide over the same span. But DOE instead opted for a standard that 99 percent of furnaces sold already meet, resulting in much less cost savings and virtually no reduction in CO2 emissions.

“DOE chose to implement a standard so weak it is simply meaningless,” said Earthjustice attorney Tim Ballo. “The vast majority of products on the market already meet the standard DOE has adopted. This is a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it efficiency increase.”

The lawsuits challenge serious flaws in DOE’s economic analysis that led the department to undervalue the benefits of stronger standards. For example, a stronger standard would most likely drive down the cost of natural gas, but the DOE failed to consider this factor in making its decision. The DOE also failed to place a dollar value on the decreased carbon dioxide emissions that would result from a stronger efficiency standard.

Earthjustice is a non-profit public interest law firm dedicated to protecting the magnificent places, natural resources, and wildlife of this earth and to defending the right of all people to a healthy environment. Earthjustice brings about far-reaching change by enforcing and strengthening environmental laws on behalf of hundreds of organizations and communities. More information on Earthjustice is available at its Web site: www.earthjustice.org

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