

Energy Justice in Virginia

Why We Need to Invest in Energy Efficiency

Burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and fracked-gas exacerbates injustices in Virginia and beyond. The communities that are least responsible for causing the climate crisis are worst hit by its impacts. At the same time, fossil fuel pollution disproportionately harms public health of low-income families and people of color. Finally, in Virginia, these same communities face high energy burdens, meaning that a disproportionate amount of their income goes towards energy bills. To correct these injustices and tackle the intersectional issues of energy, climate justice, and health, Virginia must invest in energy efficiency. There is no climate justice without energy justice.

Fossil Fuels Harm Public Health

Climate change is not a far-away concept that may impact us eventually. It is impacting Virginians and harming public health right now. High fossil fuel pollution rates are linked to increased asthma attacks, developmental delays in children, strokes, heart attacks, dementia in older adults, and lung cancer. Other severe health impacts caused or exacerbated by a warming and variable climate include an increase in heatstroke and heat-related heart attacks, as well as an increase in infections of viruses carried by mosquitoes and ticks.¹



Everyone in Virginia is impacted by fossil fuel pollution, but minority communities often face the brunt of it. These communities often are hit hardest by hurricanes and floods because they do not have as many financial resources to prepare or recover. They also tend to be placed closer to fossil fuel sources. Data shows us that communities of color, especially black and latino communities, have higher exposure rates to air pollution than other identities.² Nearly 70 percent of black communities in the U.S. live within 30 miles of a coal-powered power plant, a rate that is 75% higher than the U.S. as a whole.³

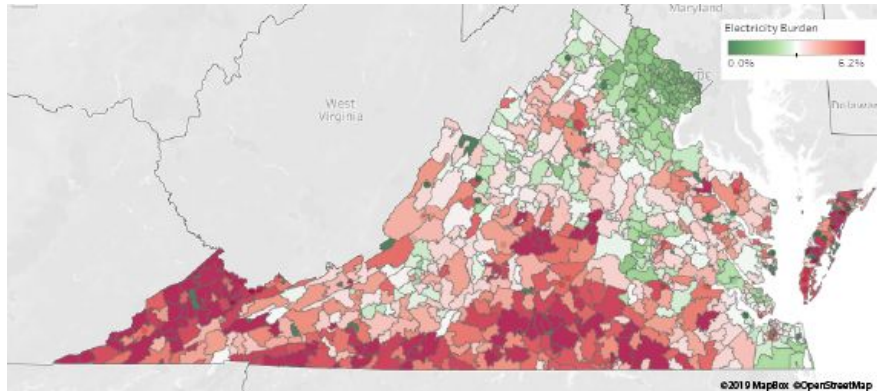
In Virginia, Everyone Has A High “Energy Burden” Thanks to Dominion

“Energy burden” is the percentage of household income spent on home energy bills. Those with a high energy burden spend a greater proportion of their income on utilities than the average family. Virginians pay more for their electricity than most of the average residents in the country, and this burden is even greater in low-income communities.⁴

According to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), Virginia has the 10th highest average residential electricity bills in the country. This alarming statistic is made even more concerning by the State Corporation Commission’s recent findings that Virginia’s largest power provider, Dominion Energy,

collected an excess of \$277 million in profits in 2018 alone, which resulted in the average electricity consumer paying an extra \$113 in unnecessary bills to Dominion in one year alone.⁵

The disparities become even more stark when you examine the data on a regional level. Nationwide, an average of 6% or below for your entire energy burden is considered “affordable.” With only one-quarter of Virginia’s zip codes experiencing a rate below 6.0%, Virginia’s electricity burden is unaffordable for over 75% of households.⁴



The energy burden is a known contributing factor to evictions. Families with limited income are sometimes forced to choose between paying their electric bill or paying the rent.⁶ For example, Richmond has one of the highest eviction rates in the country – and one of the highest energy burdens.

Virginia Needs to Invest in Energy Efficiency.

Ultimately, we want to build clean energy solutions that will not only tackle the climate crisis, but create more equitable communities. To tackle climate change and inequality at the same time, Virginia should invest in energy efficiency. There are many possible solutions: improving energy efficiency at power plants, improving insulation in homes to prevent energy waste, investing in more efficient appliances and lighting, and behavior-based programs to reduce energy use.⁷ Energy efficiency ultimately will reduce a home’s energy consumption and, as a result, will reduce monthly bills. This is a much needed step to close the gaps and help Virginia families thrive.

Take Action: Help Virginia achieve energy justice!

With the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), we can use the proceeds generated from placing a price on carbon and invest in energy efficiency programs like weatherizing and upgrades to buildings, which in turn helps Virginians use less energy and pay less on their energy bills.

Sign our petition: bit.ly/VA-RGGI-petition

For references, please visit: <https://chesapeakeclimate.org/virginia/safe-coast/>

Works Cited

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