

UNDERSTANDING REGIONAL GAS FURNACE REQUIREMENTS

A Comprehensive Guide to Colorado (CO), California (CA), and Federal Transitions

The HVAC landscape is undergoing its most significant shift in decades. Driven by air quality goals and climate legislation, the "standard" gas furnace and gas package unit is being phased out in favor of Ultra-Low NOx (Nitrogen Oxide) technology and high-efficiency heat pumps. Below is a breakdown of the critical regulations you need to know.

Colorado: The Clean Heat Transition

Colorado's **House Bill 23-1161** has officially changed the market for residential and commercial heating as of 2026.

Key Enforcement Dates

- **January 1, 2026:** All new gas furnaces and gas package units must meet **Ultra-Low NOx** standards ($\leq 10-14$ ng/J).
- **January 1, 2026:** New cooling units must transition to **A2L low-GWP refrigerants**.
- **July 1, 2026:** Adoption of the Model Low Energy and Carbon Code for new construction.

The "80% Furnace" Status: You can no longer install standard 80% AFUE furnaces or gas package units. Only 80% models specifically engineered with Ultra-Low NOx burners are permitted. Most contractors are moving toward 95%+ AFUE condensing units to qualify for state tax credits.

California: Toward Zero-Emission Heating

California leads the nation with the strictest air quality requirements, managed by the **California Air Resources Board (CARB)** and local Air Quality Management Districts (AQMD).

Ultra-Low NOx is Already the Baseline

For several years, most of California has required 14 ng/J (Ultra-Low NOx) furnaces. However, the state is now moving beyond "low emission" to "zero emission."

Region / Goal	Regulation Details	Effective Date
Statewide (CARB)	Commitment to phase out sale of all new gas furnaces and water heaters.	2030
Bay Area (BAAQMD)	Rule 9-4: Phase-out of NOx-emitting natural gas furnaces.	2027 (Residential)
South Coast (SCAQMD)	Rule 1111: Strict enforcement of 14 ng/J limits for all gas furnaces.	Active

Impact: In many CA districts, if your furnace fails after 2027-2029, a gas replacement may not be a legal option; you will likely be required to switch to an electric heat pump.

Upcoming Federal Changes (All 50 States)

Regardless of your state, two major federal shifts are coming that align with the CO and CA rules:

1. The National 95% AFUE Mandate (Late 2028)

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has finalized a rule requiring all new non-weatherized gas furnaces to have a minimum efficiency of **95% AFUE**. This effectively bans the 80% furnace nationwide for residential use starting in late 2028.

2. The A2L Refrigerant Transition (Active Now)

The **AIM Act** phase-down of R-410A refrigerants means all new air conditioning and heat pump systems must use "mildly flammable" A2L refrigerants. These systems include new safety sensors and mitigation logic, increasing equipment costs by 10-20%.

Quick Summary Checklist for Homeowners & Pros

- **CO** If installing in Colorado, verify the unit is **Ultra-Low NOx** and **A2L compliant**.

- **CA** Check your local Air District rules; you may be facing a total gas ban as early as 2027.
- **US** Prepare for 80% furnaces to disappear completely by 2028.

Disclaimer: HVAC regulations vary by municipality. Always consult with a licensed local contractor and check the latest updates from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) or the California Air Resources Board (CARB).



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