

Flow Masters Plumbing Reveals How Air District Vote Could Affect Replacement Options in Older Homes With Water Heater Problems

October 23, 2026

SAN FRANCISCO, CA - October 23, 2026 -
Flow Masters Plumbing is outlining how proposed changes to the Bay Area Air District?s zero-NOx water heater rule could affect older homes. The board will consider the amendments on November 4, as water heater leaks and other failures push owners to replace their water heaters. Under the proposal, the start date would move from January 2027 to January 2028, with added exemptions.

Adopted in March 2023, the rule sets a zero nitrogen oxide standard for gas water heaters up to 75,000 BTU per hour, typically residential tank models. It applies only at replacement, not to heaters already in service. The district links gas-fired water heater and furnace pollution to as many as 85 premature deaths in the Bay Area each year.

The proposed language, published October 2, adds exemptions for low-income owners, owners with high housing costs, and installations with space or electrical constraints. Electrical constraints include panels

below 100 amps and installations that would need more than 50 feet of new conduit. The space and electrical exemptions allow one noncompliant replacement per address.

The electrical provisions also address knob-and-tube wiring, found in early twentieth-century homes, when a long conduit run is needed. Roughly 45 percent of San Francisco housing units date to 1939 or earlier, according to American Community Survey estimates. Flow Masters Plumbing notes water heater problems in older San Francisco homes often involve connections and venting, not only the tank.

Replacement decisions usually begin with a failure. Flow Masters Plumbing identifies a worn drain valve, sediment buildup, a loose fitting, and a corroded tank as usual causes of water at the base of a heater. A puddle at the base does not always mean the tank has failed, since water can run down the outside of the unit.

A loose fitting or worn drain valve can often be repaired in under an hour without replacing the unit. Once the tank's inner lining deteriorates and the steel corrodes, replacement becomes the only lasting option. Tank-style units generally last eight to 12 years, but a leaking valve or fitting may still be worth repairing on an older unit.

When a heater fails without warning, the timing of the replacement can shape the available options. The proposed language would allow a licensed contractor with an exemption certificate to temporarily install a noncompliant gas unit, with removal due within 12 months unless another exemption applies. Electric models, including heat pump water heaters, are currently the main way to meet the zero-NOx standard.

Diagnosis carries added weight in older homes, where a leak can start at a fitting above the visible puddle. Flow Masters Plumbing uses thermal imaging cameras, combustion analyzers, gas sniffers, and electrical multimeters to trace hidden leaks and electrical faults. During replacements, the company inspects and, where needed, upgrades connection lines and venting to meet local code.

Regional funding is arriving alongside the rule. Bay Area officials announced about $85 million a year in rebates and incentives for home electrification in September, according to Axios. CleanPowerSF customers can receive a $1,200 bill credit for a qualifying heat pump water heater, according to city officials.

The board?s decision will determine whether the January 2028 start date and the proposed exemptions take effect. Public comment on the proposed language closes November 1 at 6 p.m. Until the board acts, the existing standard remains scheduled for January 2027.

Flow Masters Plumbing was co-founded in 2011 by Alan Moran and Fergal McMahon. The company provides plumbing and water heater services throughout the Bay Area. It maintains offices in San Francisco and Daly

City.

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Flow Masters Plumbing

Our team provides drain cleaning, sewer line repair, tankless water heater installation, hydro jetting, backflow testing, emergency plumbing, trenchless sewer repairs, water leak detection, boiler installation and repair etc.

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