

OPINION

Pass home heating oil bill to protect the public health

by Albert Baldeo

As a citizen concerned about our environment, I urge the state Senate and Assembly to pass their respective bills S1145-A and A8642, which will protect public health and greatly reduce air pollution.

The measures would require No. 2 heating oil, the most widely used, to meet the same refining standards the federal government mandates for diesel fuel used in vehicles. If the oil we use in our vehicles must satisfy safety standards, then the oil that we use in our heating systems in our homes must, at a minimum, follow suit. They are essentially the same substance.

The federal government will not address this pollution menace, due to the regional nature of home heating oil use. It therefore behooves the state Legislature to pass this vitally important piece of legislation, which curbs greenhouse gas emissions.

Most home heating oil is extremely high in sulfur and releases dangerous pollution into the air, including ozone and fine particles called PM 2.5. Much of downstate New York, including New York City, exceeds federal standards for PM 2.5 and for ozone. These particles are linked to serious health and respiratory conditions, such as irritation of the airways, coughing,

difficulty in breathing, decreased lung function, aggravated asthma, development of chronic bronchitis and irregular heartbeat. They also shorten life expectancy.

New York State is the largest consumer of home heating oil, and this initiative will make our state the national leader in eliminating one of the causes of global warming and improving the health of those suffering from respiratory and other conditions. The sulfur reduction that will result from the passage of this law is equivalent to shutting down two and a half coal plants in New York State.

We simply cannot fail to act on our community's health, and studies assure us that the cost of this strategy is minimal. The costs of No. 2 heating oil and on-road, ultra-low sulfur diesel oil, are often within 3 to 5 percent of each other.

The state Legislature must pass this important law expeditiously, as a matter of urgent health necessity. 

Albert Baldeo is an Ozone Park-based attorney and community activist.

