

The “New Study Finds” Approach to Overregulation

“Now we’re cooking with gas!”

This classic Americanism carries the sense of definite progress, things working according to plan, and being headed to success (perhaps after an uncertain start). It has the same rhetorical heft as “Full steam ahead.” It was popularized by radio stars Bob Hope and Jack Benny in the 1930s, and was even used in a [Daffy Duck cartoon](#).

It originated, however, from [brilliant marketing insight](#). In the 1930s gas-fired stoves and their electric competitors were vying to replace old wood-fired stoves. Rather than use the slogan in print and television advertisements, however, American Gas Association public relations executive Carroll Everard “Deke” Houlgate decided to plant it with Hope’s scriptwriters. It soon became the comedian’s catchphrase, and Benny and others picked it up from there as it [entered the public lexicon](#).

Nearly a century later, however, the environmental zealots in the Biden administration and their media apologists would like to make cooking with gas much harder, or impossible, to do. When [new research](#) purporting to link gas stove use with asthma in children appeared in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* on December 21, 2022, they must’ve thought: “Now we’re cooking with gas!”

Coming from researchers at RMI, a think tank seeking a “clean energy revolution,” the University of Sydney, and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the research filled the role of a study since the COVID era: just provide a modicum of “New Study Finds” justification for predetermined government intervention, and let state-awed media do the rest. Pandemic

policies showed that lack of rigor notwithstanding, few are those who will say 'to hell with your study, this isn't government's business in the first place.'

The study in question could serve as a classroom example of confusing correlation with causation. The authors started with 357 studies using a keyword search, which they whittled down to a handful of "potentially pertinent" studies based on narrowing their focus to [data specific only to the US and Europe](#). Coincidentally, it meant they discarded *the most comprehensive study in the research literature on the subject*: a 2013 study for phase three of the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood, which involved "512,707 primary and secondary school children from 108 centers in 47 countries."

That study found "[no evidence of an association between the use of gas as a cooking fuel and either asthma symptoms or asthma diagnosis](#)."

The authors instead used combined estimates of gas stove effects on the risk of developing childhood asthma in North America (three studies) and Europe (seven studies), and then estimated the proportion of children in the US in households with gas stoves using data from the American Housing Survey. There's no measure of the exposure level of any child to a household gas stove. But by a string of inferences and associations they churned out a statistic that "12.7 percent of current childhood asthma nationwide is attributed to gas stove use, which is similar to the childhood asthma burden attributed to secondhand smoke exposure."

The phrase "attributed to" certainly seemed to point the finger of causation. Nevertheless, one of the study's authors, Brady A. Seals, told *Washington Examiner* that the study "[does not assume or estimate a causal relationship](#)" between childhood asthma and gas stoves. Oh?

Even if the study were not assuming causality by using language indicating causality, its authors assumed they knew how to mitigate it. “Given that this exposure is preventable, our study demonstrates that known mitigation strategies will lessen childhood asthma burden from gas stoves,” they wrote. By “demonstrates” they mean *made up*: “we can conceive of a broad-based public health intervention to reduce the disease risk in children exposed to gas cooking to that of the unexposed,” which would be “removing the source by replacing gas cooking with cleaner alternatives (e.g., electric)” and “reducing exposure through source ventilation (e.g., range hoods).”

To recap: the authors chose a handful of studies, discarded 35 times as many as they chose (including one that involved over a half a million children across four dozen countries), aggregated the gas stove risks estimated by the few they kept, used the Housing Survey to project how many kids are in homes with gas stoves, and determined that about one in eight cases of childhood asthma can be attributed to something that in is two of every five homes. That’s “causation” in the same way that a guess in the game of “Clue” is forensic science. Rather than the magnitude of their findings giving them pause, let alone the fact that they never measured the exposure level of any child to gas stove usage, they immediately proposed “mitigation strategies,” leading with “replacing gas cooking.”

It was well-timed. The American people were just becoming aware of [efforts](#) within the US Consumer Protection Safety Commission, going back to [October 2022](#), to [regulate and potentially ban](#) some gas stoves, and the people were infuriated. Then Energy Secretary [Jennifer Granholm](#) told an Arizona news station it was all “so ridiculous” – mere [days before](#) the Department of Energy (DOE) proposed new energy-use limits on stoves. Never mind the CPSC, the DOE’s rules are so restrictive that they would “[eliminate most current models](#)” of gas stoves, [effectively banning an estimated 95 percent](#) of

them. Taking up a whopping 86 pages in the *Federal Register*, these rules had obviously been in the works for a while.

So these preexisting regulatory efforts got that crucial “new study finds” lifeline. “Gas stove pollution causes 12.7 percent of childhood asthma, study finds,” reported The [Washington Post](#). “About 12 percent of childhood asthma cases can be linked to gas stove use, according to a recent study,” said [U.S. News & World Report](#). “One in eight cases of asthma in US kids caused by gas stove pollution – study,” the [Guardian](#) declared. [Yahoo News](#) opted for “Gas stoves have given 650,000 US children asthma, study finds.”

As this decade has made plainly evident, the distinction between correlation and causation is not important to those who want to expand governmental power. An aggressive bureaucracy needs only an affectation of justification for a regulation or ban already in the works.

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