

## METHANE

### EPA plan: Increased emissions, 'adverse' health effects

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Unwanted methane burns at a natural gas refinery in Colorado. Tim Hurst/Flickr

EPA today proposed to reduce methane leak monitoring for the oil and gas industry, a move it says would increase greenhouse gas emissions and potentially harm public health.

The agency this morning released its proposed revisions to the Obama administration's New Source Performance Standards for new and modified oil and gas sources ([Greenwire](#), Sept. 11).

Under the proposal, the industry would have to monitor wells on an annual basis, and low-production ones every other year. The Obama-era rule required methane monitoring twice a year.

EPA is also suggesting semiannual and annual monitoring for compressor stations and annual monitoring for compressor stations on the Alaska North Slope. The Obama-era rule required methane monitoring twice a year.

The agency is taking a look at various technical requirements in the Obama rule. EPA is re-evaluating certification requirements for closed vent systems.

It is also studying provisions on alternate emissions limitations, well completions, onshore natural gas processing plants and storage vessels, and is planning some technical corrections.

The proposed amendments are the third in a series of regulatory rollbacks aimed at greenhouse gases, following moves to change the Clean Power Plan and vehicle emissions standards.

The Interior Department is also expected to release its own revisions to methane rules covering the oil and gas industry on public lands.

### Impacts

EPA said changes in monitoring frequency would provide cost savings. At the same time, it estimated the changes would lead to higher emissions, degraded air quality, and "adverse health and welfare effects."

EPA estimated the foregone climate-related benefits of the rule at between \$13.5 million and \$54 million between 2019 and 2025.

This calculation is based on a domestic social cost of carbon, which considers a dollar value for the harm caused

by climate change.

The metric is different from the one adopted by the Obama administration, which relied on a global social cost of carbon value.

The agency's analysis of the proposal found that monitoring emissions on an annual basis from compressor stations between 2019 and 2025 would increase fugitive methane emissions by 100,000 short tons, volatile organic compounds by 24,000 tons and hazardous air pollutants by 890 tons, compared with monitoring on a semiannual basis.

## Reactions

Janet McCabe, who was acting head of EPA's air office as the Obama rule was finalized, noted that the oil and gas industry is the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the country, after mobile sources and power plants.

"There is nothing ground-breaking about the technologies or activities called for in the 2016 rule. In this Administration's drive to de-regulate, they are heedless of the cost to the public health and the cost to the future of the planet," McCabe said in an email.

Howard Learner, executive director of the Environmental Law & Policy Center, slammed EPA for moving to undo "common sense" methane reduction standards.

"The Administration's ideology is trumping common sense methane reduction standards that avoid energy waste and protect the public and our environment from dangerous smog-forming pollution," Learner said.

During remarks at a climate conference today, California Gov. Jerry Brown (D) said, "That is insane. It borders on criminality."

Industry groups cheered the proposed changes. "We welcome EPA's efforts to get this right and the proposed changes could ensure that the rule is based on best engineering practices and cost-effective," said Howard Feldman, senior director of regulatory and scientific affairs at the American Petroleum Institute, in a statement.

Feldman touted technological advances in hydraulic fracturing that have helped to cut carbon emissions. "U.S. air quality continues to improve as the natural gas and oil industry remains committed to reaching our shared goals of protecting public health and the environment while meeting the nation's energy needs," he added.

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