



We Need to Tackle this Major Climate Pollutant; a New Bill will Help

Information:

In a competition of climate change’s worst villains, methane just might take the top prize. Formed deep beneath the earth's surface, methane is the primary ingredient of natural gas, which is an increasingly popular source of energy in the U.S. A huge amount of methane leaks or is intentionally vented into the atmosphere during ordinary natural gas drilling and processing. When released into the air through venting, flaring and accidental leaks, methane traps heat in the Earth’s atmosphere more immediately and intensely than carbon dioxide. That makes it a more potent driver of climate change. The combustion of natural gas creates a new set of problems. The process releases an array of toxic chemicals that pollute the air we breathe and can cause serious health problems, from asthma to cancer. To add insult to injury, a lot of these methane leaks are happening on public lands. Roughly 13 percent of natural gas production in the U.S. happens on public lands, and between 2009 and 2015, oil and gas operators managing those projects leaked, vented or otherwise wasted 462 billion cubic feet (BcF) of natural gas. That would have been enough to power 6.2 million households for a full year. Luckily, a new bill is setting the stage for the U.S. to take on this huge problem. Introduced by Colorado Rep. Diana DeGette, the Methane Waste Prevention Act of 2019 would create new safeguards to get methane waste and pollution

under control across all public lands. The bill would require the capture of 85 percent of natural gas produced on public lands within 3 years of enactment and stronger reporting of leaks.

Why we need to cut methane leaks and pollution now:

- **They ramp up climate change.** Believe it or not, when methane leaks into the Earth’s atmosphere, the gas is about 120 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in its capacity to trap heat. It’s the second most common greenhouse gas emitted in the U.S. after carbon dioxide. Especially as the world races against time to avoid the worst effects of climate change, it is vital we figure out a way to rein methane in. Specifically, the release of this gas from energy development on public lands is part of a huge “blind spot” in our accounting of emissions (more than 20 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions come from the extraction and production of fossil fuels on public lands, but federal agencies do not comprehensively track this data). Natural gas wasted on public lands releases the emissions equivalent of what 3.3 million cars would produce by driving around for a year. By getting “fugitive” methane under control, we could take a big step toward addressing climate change.
- **They make the air less safe to breathe.** Take a deep breath and consider this: More methane is associated with more pollution in the air that we breathe. When methane in the lower atmosphere oxidizes, it forms ozone—the main ingredient in smog, which can cause a host of health problems. Dangerous toxins like benzene, a

known carcinogen, are released alongside methane at oil and gas sites, too. Other pollutants associated with gas production can trigger asthma attacks and worsen respiratory diseases such as emphysema. A recent report from the American Lung Association reinforced how important it is to address smog and air pollution. More than 4 in 10 people now live in counties that received failing grades when it comes to clean air, and ozone levels are getting worse across much of the U.S

- **They waste taxpayer money.** All that methane waste also means a lot of taxpayer money going down the drain – or to be more precise, up in the air. Between 2009 and 2015, the methane leaked, vented or otherwise wasted by oil and gas operators robbed taxpayers of about \$1.7 billion in royalties that companies are supposed to pay for their use of shared resources.

DeGette’s bill a golden opportunity: Since Trump was elected, his administration has worked to weaken and roll back common-sense rules that protect our health and climate, including from dangerous methane pollution. The Methane Waste Prevention Act of 2019 is a long-overdue way to fight back, protecting communities living near fossil fuel development and helping ensure public lands are a part of climate change solution instead of the problem.

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