



FACT SHEET

# METHANE POLLUTION STANDARDS: SAVING LIVES AND CREATING JOBS

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) adopted standards in May 2016 that will limit the amount of methane and other air pollutants that companies may allow to leak or vent into the air from new equipment and processes in the oil and gas sector. Leaks and venting create public health and environmental hazards and waste valuable natural gas that companies should be delivering for sale to customers. The new standards can be met using readily available, low-cost—and often cost-saving—technology. The standards are already providing health protections to Americans and are beginning to reduce the \$2 billion worth of gas wasted every year through leaky oil and gas operations.

## WHY STANDARDS?

- Methane leakage from oil and gas operations is the second largest industrial contributor to climate change in the United States.<sup>1</sup>
- Along with methane, oil and gas operations leak cancer-causing benzene and other toxic chemicals into the air, increasing the risk of some cancers, heart and lung problems, neurological disorders, and birth defects.<sup>2</sup> Other chemicals from oil and gas operations contribute to high levels of ozone smog found even in largely rural states like Wyoming.<sup>3</sup>
- These dangerous air pollutants are a particular threat to the more than 12 million Americans who live within a half-mile of oil and gas operations—4.6 million of whom live in Ohio and Pennsylvania alone.<sup>4</sup>
- Voluntary industry efforts have not successfully reduced these emissions. Just 1 percent of oil and gas companies have participated in the EPA's Natural Gas STAR Program over the last 20 years.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, despite some voluntary efforts by some companies, the sector's overall methane emissions have generally increased in recent years, in particular among production companies and on the oil side of the industry.<sup>6</sup>

## BASIS IN LAW

The Clean Air Act requires the EPA to set standards for industrial sources of air pollutants that “endanger public health and welfare.” The EPA has long regulated dangerous smog-causing and toxic air pollution from oil and gas operations, and has determined that the industry's methane emissions endanger public health and welfare by powerfully contributing to climate change.

## AMERICANS BENEFIT: HEALTH, JOBS, ENVIRONMENT

In 2025, five years into their implementation, the EPA's methane pollution standards for new sources will:

- Prevent approximately 510,000 short tons of methane pollution.<sup>7</sup> This is equivalent to the climate impact of annual emissions from about 8.5 million cars or 11 coal plants, using the most recent science on the heat-trapping power of methane.<sup>8</sup>
- Prevent approximately 210,000 tons of harmful volatile organic compounds and 3,900 tons of hazardous air pollutants.<sup>9</sup> Such pollution reductions will help address the approximately 750,000 childhood asthma attacks, 2,000 asthma-related emergency room visits, and 600 hospital admissions each year that are linked to the oil and gas industry's volatile organic compound pollution, as well as reduce communities' risks of cancer and other impacts from air toxics like benzene.

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- Yield climate benefits of approximately \$690 million, outweighing costs of approximately \$530 million. This is a conservative estimate of the overall benefits of the standards, because it does not include the health benefits of avoiding smog-causing and toxic air pollution.<sup>10</sup>

Compliance with the standards is also expected to support approximately 1,100 jobs in 2020 and 1,800 in 2025.<sup>11</sup> These include jobs in manufacturing, installing, and maintaining emission reduction equipment, and monitoring for and fixing leaks. A 2014 analysis found the median hourly wage for methane mitigation jobs is nearly \$31, compared to less than \$20 for all jobs in the United States. Sixty percent of methane mitigation firms are in just five states, including Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana.<sup>12</sup>

## BUILDING ON STATE ACTION

The EPA's methane standards draw on current, pending, and proposed pollution standards for the oil and gas industry in a number of states, including Colorado, Pennsylvania, North Dakota, Utah, Wyoming, and California.<sup>13</sup>

## BROAD SUPPORT

- 60 percent of American voters favor limits on methane and toxic pollution from the oil and gas industry, as do businesses, labor groups, public health professionals, Latino groups, and faith leaders.<sup>14</sup>
- A recent survey shows a majority of Trump voters support upholding or strengthening current climate change policies and think U.S. companies should be required to reduce climate pollution.<sup>15</sup>
- A 2016 survey found that 7 of 10 representatives of Colorado oil and gas companies agree the benefits of the state's methane standards outweigh the costs.<sup>16</sup>

### ENDNOTES

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