

# THE SACRAMENTO BEE

## Too much catch-up on Aliso Canyon methane leak

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This state may be leading the fight against global warming, but the [Aliso Canyon methane disaster](#) has been a humbling primer in all the catching up we still have to do.

A [Public Utilities Commission report released this week](#) revealed that the catastrophic leak capped last month in Southern California was merely the biggest among more than 200 previously unaddressed “fugitive emissions” of the destructive greenhouse gas at underground natural-gas storage facilities statewide.

Most leaks were minor, but eight were safety hazards. That may sound like relatively good news, but it isn't. Methane is a highly potent heat-trapping pollutant, and cumulatively those leaks, apparently now fixed, will add up to long-term climate damage. The PUC report confirmed that the barn door has been shut for the moment, now that the horse has galloped full speed into the distance.

No one knows how long some of those leaks spewed before the Aliso Canyon evacuations forced those inspections; all that's clear is that those facilities must be better monitored from now on.

That theme – playing catch-up – extends to the state's greenhouse gas regulations. Incredibly, though California's groundbreaking climate change laws are among the nation's most stringent, Southern California Gas Co. appears not to have explicitly broken them in allowing the Aliso Canyon leak.

That's because when the blowout occurred, the state hadn't yet gotten around to specifically regulating industrial methane storage. The climate change law, Assembly Bill 32, has only been around for a decade, and because so much of the state's carbon footprint arises from traffic congestion, the California Air Resources Board focused first on the years-long process of writing rules for carbon dioxide and other transportation-related pollutants.

Now, of course, [methane scrutiny abounds](#), from emergency regulations imposed after Aliso Canyon to draft air board rules and proposed state and federal legislation. But in the short term, it's unclear what fines or penalties, civil or criminal, the state can extract from SoCal Gas, other than the company's own laudable pledge to [mitigate the environmental impact](#).

The state has joined a [lawsuit filed by the Los Angeles city attorney](#), charging that the leak created a public nuisance, but that's a wan retort to the worst natural-gas leak in U.S. history. If the attorney general and state regulators really can't find a way under current law to take more appropriate action, so be it. But this is a huge and embarrassing oversight for a state that bills itself as a climate champion. We should do better than catch-up as an enforcement strategy.