

# Daily Camera

**Christine Berg, et al.: Local officials supporting EPA's new methane rules**

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One in three Americans lives in a county with oil and gas development. Right now, methane is leaking from over a million oil and gas wells, infrastructure and associated equipment located across the country. In aggregate, that's over 7 million metric tons of methane emissions a year — enough gas to heat 5 million American homes.

We are part of a nationwide group of mayors and commissioners from 14 states and the District of Columbia who sent a letter to President Obama and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy urging the EPA to take action on dangerous methane pollution from new and existing oil and gas industry sources. The nationwide coalition wrote, "Across the country oil and gas wells and infrastructure are continuously moving closer to our constituents. If the oil and gas industry continues to expand, it is imperative that they reduce air pollution. People living, working and going to school near oil and gas facilities in states without air pollution limits deserve to breathe the same cleaner air that Colorado's new and existing source methane rule is ensuring."

Last week, the EPA finalized the first nationwide safeguards limiting dangerous methane pollution from new and modified sources in the oil and gas industry. According to the EPA, these standards will reduce 510,000 short tons of methane, 210,000 tons of volatile organic compounds, and 3,900 tons of air toxics in 2025. They are projected to result in \$690 million in climate benefits, outweighing the costs.

This action represents one of the Obama Administration's most important steps towards keeping Americans safe and healthy. Oil and gas companies are releasing millions of tons of methane pollution into our air, and today's announcement is the best way to begin protecting Americans from the disastrous impacts of those pollutants.

Colorado has been at the forefront on the issue of reducing methane waste and pollution from the oil and gas industry by creating first-in-the-nation regulations on methane pollution. A recent case study by the Center for Methane Emissions Solutions surveyed Colorado oil and gas operators on their experience complying with the state methane rules. Operators responded that the methane regulations are effective at helping them find leaks, and reduce emissions, and they believe the benefits of these regulations outweigh the costs.

Our state has shown that all stakeholders can come to the table to produce standards that reduce methane emissions from both new and existing oil and gas wells in a manner that both promotes positive business outcomes and cleans up our air.

Methane is a particularly potent climate pollutant, with more than 80 times the warming potential of carbon dioxide over a 20-year period, and the oil and gas sector is the largest industrial emitter of methane emissions. By combining the EPA's rule for new sources, efforts from the BLM to reduce emissions and waste from oil and gas development on federal and tribal lands, and a further EPA rule for existing sources, we can reduce methane emissions from oil and gas by more than 40 percent. And because methane is the primary constituent of natural gas, reducing these emissions is extremely cost-effective.

Current methane pollution is responsible for 25 percent of man-made climate change. A standard for new methane pollution will not be enough on its own — we must take action to address the millions of tons of methane pollution already leaking into the air from existing sources. The President has committed to taking this action on existing sources, and we stand ready to work with him towards that goal.

The negative health impacts of climate change are well established: rising temperatures expose our constituents to greater risks of respiratory illness, heat-and-weather related stress and disease carried by insects. When it comes to pollution from oil and gas development, however, there are additional grave risks from the volatile organic compounds emitted along with methane that make smog worse, which include toxic chemicals like benzene — a known carcinogen. Strong standards are needed to keep our air clean and our constituents healthy.

By reducing emissions of short-lived climate forcers like methane, we can take significant steps towards meeting our global greenhouse gas reduction targets, clean up the air near oil and gas facilities, save industry money and continue to spur American innovation. Doing so will better protect our constituents from unhealthy air pollution associated with methane and toxic chemicals emitted from oil and gas infrastructure and equipment, and protect us from the consequences of climate change that our cities and counties face on a daily basis.

*Christine Berg is mayor of Lafayette. Also signing on to this guest opinion are Clint Folsom, mayor of Superior; Bob Muckle, mayor of Louisville; Suzanne Jones, mayor of Boulder; Tina Harris, mayor of Erie; Dennis Coombs, mayor of Longmont; Joe Gierlach, former mayor of Nederland; John O'Brien, former mayor of Lyons; and Elise Jones and Deb Gardner, Boulder County commissioners.*