

**Oil and Natural Gas Sector:
Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources Reconsideration
Docket No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2017-0483**

December 17, 2018

Dear U.S. EPA Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler,

As local elected officials from across the United States, we write to you today to express our strong opposition to the Environmental Protection Agency's ("EPA's") proposed rule entitled *Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources Reconsideration*, 83 Fed. Reg. 52,056 (Oct. 15, 2018). We urge the U.S. EPA to abandon this rulemaking effort, and retain the 2016 new source methane rule which has already been in effect and delivering pollution reductions for over two years.

EPA's proposed rollback comes as mounting scientific evidence underscores the need for cutting methane emissions from the oil and gas sector. Most recently, a 2018 study in the journal *Science* that included more than 140 researchers from 40 institutions found that the EPA has underestimated methane emissions from the oil and gas industry by nearly 60 percent. In fact, the oil and gas industry emits 13 million metric tons of methane each year. That is about \$2 billion-worth of natural gas and enough energy to meet the needs of 10 million households.

Instead of tackling this problem, the EPA's proposed rollback would significantly weaken the reasonable standards found in the current rule, allowing hundreds of thousands of tons of additional methane, volatile organic compounds, and hazardous air pollutants to enter our air while wasting tens of millions of dollars-worth of American natural gas.

While several leading states have already demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of methane standards for the oil and gas industry, EPA's proposal would allow significant additional pollution by both loosening federal safeguards and allowing other weak state programs to substitute for federal standards—harming all Americans.

Some states have already implemented protections similar to those found in the current standards and proven them to be cost-effective. For example, Colorado was the first state to adopt methane rules in 2014 that included standards that require regular leak detection and repair (up to once a month at facilities with the largest potential for emissions). After the first year of implementation, these standards resulted in a 75 percent decrease in detected leaks. This was accomplished with no complaints to the state about the cost of compliance. Indeed, the standards have been so successful that Colorado recently moved to strengthen them.¹

Other states such as California, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming have likewise taken steps to implement leak detection and repair programs at oil and gas facilities. These states demonstrate the importance, feasibility, and cost-effectiveness of addressing harmful pollution from the oil and gas sector.

In contrast, other states such as Texas—which has the most oil and gas wells in the country—lack meaningful state standards for methane and smog-forming pollution from the oil and gas sector. While

¹ <https://www.edf.org/media/colorado-oil-gas-association-and-environmental-defense-fund-joint-statement-air-quality>.

EPA has proposed to deem Texas's state requirements equivalent to the current standards, analysis indicates that at most, 5% of the more than 10,000 wells in Texas subject to the current EPA standards are required by the state to conduct some form of leak detection and repair.²

EPA's proposal to simultaneously weaken leak detection requirements and to allow state program with little to no protections substitute for federal standards runs contrary to longstanding history of the new source performance standards—which were meant to provide a uniform set of protections that all Americans can rely on—and will leave millions of Americans, including those in our communities, exposed to additional air pollution.

Air pollution does not stop at the state border, and the EPA has a duty to set a strong floor by retaining the current federal standards for reducing methane emissions and air pollution from the oil and gas industry.

Rolling back the EPA's current new source methane rule will simply result in dirty air and wasted energy. Again, we respectfully request that the EPA withdraw its proposal.

Very sincerely,

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San Luis Obispo, California

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² Dr. Renee McVay and Hillary Hull, Assessment of State-Level Fugitive Emissions Programs in Comparison to EPA NSPS (Dec. 8, 2017), available at <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505-12451>.

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