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Ohio Nurses, Mothers, Businesses and Environmental Groups Applaud New Methane Pollution Standard

*New standard will help safeguard public health in Ohio while mitigating climate change and
reducing waste*

Washington, D.C. - The Obama Administration today introduced the first-ever methane pollution standards for new and modified oil and gas facilities, a landmark announcement that will blunt the projected growth of global-warming methane and smog-forming pollution produced by the industry. The newly proposed standards will help to safeguard public health and put the United States on track to meet the Administration's goal of reducing oil and gas methane pollution by 40 to 45 percent by 2025.

Methane pollution and other toxic chemicals leaked and intentionally released during the oil and gas drilling and delivery process pose a threat to public health in Ohio, where rates of asthma are above the national average. In Ohio, approximately 14 percent of children and adults will suffer from asthma sometime over their lifetime. The southeastern part of the state, the same areas where natural gas operations are based, have the highest rates of

asthma. Currently, air pollution levels near some oil and gas wells are competing with Houston for the nation's dirtiest air.

"We know that people living in oil and gas country in Ohio are particularly vulnerable to health problems from air pollution," stated Melanie Houston, Director of Environmental Health for the Ohio Environmental Council. "All Ohioans deserve the right to breathe clean air. The methane pollution standards are a big step forward in protecting citizens from smog and toxic air."

Oil and gas facilities leak methane pollution that mixes with emissions from the heavy equipment to create record high smog levels. This toxic air pollution can cause serious health problems including cancer and pose a risk to the workers and nearby, often disadvantaged, neighbors. The proposed standards will reduce these careless leaks and release of pollution and other chemicals.

"Clean air is essential for primary prevention of asthma and chronic obstructive lung disease," said Dr. Peggy Ann Berry, occupational safety and health nurse consultant. "The new methane pollution standard will keep our kids healthy and prevent disease among workers."

With methane pollution to blame for a quarter of man-made global warming, the proposed standards also will help the United States chart a course towards the goal of achieving overall emissions reductions of 20 to 25 percent by 2025. Pound for pound, methane gas traps more than 80 times as much heat on our planet in the short term as carbon dioxide.

"Methane pollution is one of the worst climate offenders, adding fuel to the fire through increases in heat and drought, the rise in sea level and the uptick in super storms," stated Laura Burns, Mom's Clean Air Force Ohio Organizer. "Making changes in the methane emissions standards helps us protect our children today and tomorrow."

For years, the runaway oil and gas industry has been allowed to leak, flare, and vent millions of tons of methane and toxic chemicals into the air with little-to-no oversight. Earlier this year, the Obama Administration's proposed non-enforceable voluntary measures for oil and gas producers designed to reduce methane pollution, but the number of companies that participate nationally is only 1 percent.

In Ohio, four out of five wells are not required to report their emissions. This has resulted in millions of tons of methane pollution, akin to an oil spill that can't be seen. For example, in 2013 alone, oil and gas facilities in Ohio wasted approximately 180,000 metric tons of methane, which is enough natural gas to power 100,000 Ohio homes.

“The new methane standard is common sense – it is good for Ohioans, good for our climate, and the technology to capture emissions is available and affordable,” said Christine Hughes, small business owner and member of the Ohio Sustainable Business Council. “As a business owner who engages in responsible practices, I expect the oil and gas industry to do the same.”

While the standards proposed by the Administration would cover new and modified sites, existing oil and gas equipment would be exempt from the rule, thereby allowing them to continue to pollute our air with methane and toxic chemicals.

“More than 1.5 million Ohioans live in areas where ozone levels exceed national clean air standards—areas that also contain more than 8,500 oil and gas wells,” stated Teresa Mills, Director of Fracking at the Buckeye Forest Council. “While this rule is a starting place, existing oil and gas equipment must also be addressed to protect as many Ohioans as possible.”

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio’s leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio’s families and communities. For more information, visit www.theOEC.org.

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