

## **We must plug methane leaks in Pa.**

From the Paris Agreement signed by nearly 200 nations to the work of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on its Clean Power Plan — the first-ever limits to carbon pollution from existing power plants — the move to a lower-carbon economy here in the U.S. and around the globe is underway. But there's another climate culprit out there, a greenhouse gas more than 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide over a 100-year period: methane, the primary component of natural gas. To really tackle the challenge of climate change, we must also address methane leaks.

Methane leaks are an invisible but significant problem, accounting for up to a quarter of America's total greenhouse gas emissions. From the pipes underneath your street to the oil fields of North Dakota, natural gas leaks threaten our climate and our communities. This year, President Obama took a significant step to address this by setting a goal to reduce methane emissions up to 45 percent across the energy sector from 2012 levels by 2025.

Achieving the administration's goal could reduce this pollution and wasted gas equivalent to an estimated 80 million tons of carbon dioxide per year, comparable if not higher than reductions in current federal policies to move to cleaner vehicles or power plants. Here in Pennsylvania alone, companies wasted over 120,000 metric tons of methane in 2013. Outdated practices and leaking equipment among Pennsylvania energy companies waste the amount of natural gas that would heat 75,000 homes — or half of the homes in Pittsburgh — for a year, and produces the equivalent annual greenhouse gas emissions of the over 700,000 cars in Allegheny County.

This summer, the EPA followed up Obama's pledge by proposing common-sense standards that would require oil and gas operators to plug these leaks and become more efficient. This is a smart move. Proven, off-the-shelf technologies can deliver these reductions at low cost. An ICF International report estimated methane emissions could be reduced by 40 percent below projected 2018 levels at an average annual cost of less than one penny per thousand cubic feet of produced natural gas.

Efforts to reduce methane loss by improving industry practices and technologies will result in safer working conditions and job opportunities for energy sector workers. Furthermore, unionized gas workers are eminently qualified to identify and repair leaks, install and operate the newest leak reduction technologies, and inform industrial practices.

In addition to those "upstream" oil and gas activities, natural gas leaks — whether accidental or by design — are also pervasive throughout the natural gas distribution (downstream) systems delivering gas to homes and businesses within our communities, with many portions of this system dating back to the 19th century. There are more than 100,000 miles of leak-prone pipe made of obsolete materials such as cast iron and bare

steel — which leak methane at a level upward of 50 times that of advanced materials being installed today — underneath our nation's cities and towns. At the current rate of progress, it could take 30 years or longer to repair and upgrade those vulnerable segments of our natural gas distribution systems. Moving up the timeline to repair those leak-prone pipes from 30 years to 10 years could create nearly 250,000 more jobs and avert more than 80 million metric tons of greenhouse gases pollutions over a decade.

We're glad to see the Obama administration tackling the issue of upstream natural gas leaks, and hope they become the law of the land next year. We hope these policies eventually cover all sources of these unnecessary leaks. But, in Congress there are efforts to stymie these common sense efforts and we need our Pennsylvania leaders — like Sen. Bob Casey — to lead the way to ensuring they remain intact and strong, as well as to support other climate efforts, like the Clean Power Plan.

Keeping natural gas in the system is the right and smart thing to do. It will keep communities and workers safe, grow and sustain good jobs developing, manufacturing and implementing the technologies to stop leaks, and will help us in our efforts to tackle climate change. It's a winning proposition all around.

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