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Response to EPA's rollback of the 2024 Methane Rule

EHP condemns federal actions to weaken air quality regulations.

Background

Methane is the primary component of shale gas, which has been linked to a range of adverse health outcomes, including chronic heart and respiratory illnesses, pregnancy and birth complications, and cancer. Oil and gas facilities emit methane through intentional releases, such as venting and flaring, as well as through leaks during regular operations. Methane typically travels with co-pollutants, including volatile organic compounds, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter, each of which is known to be harmful to human health. Therefore, whenever facilities emit methane, these accompanying pollutants put the health of nearby communities at risk.

Dozens of epidemiological studies demonstrate the link between proximity to methane-emitting facilities and negative health consequences, but these facilities also represent health risks on a global scale. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas with a climate-warming potential 80 times higher than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. Climate change resulting from methane emissions extends health risks across the globe in the form of insect-borne diseases and heat-related illnesses, as well as increased injuries, displacements, and deaths from storms, floods, and wildfires.

In an effort to curtail energy waste and limit the health consequences of methane releases, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) constructed the 2024 Methane Rule in consultation with oil and gas industry, investors, members of Congress, advocacy organizations, health experts, and frontline community representatives. The EPA estimated that this rule would eliminate 58 million tons of methane between 2024 and 2038, as well as 16 million tons of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and 590,000 tons of hazardous air pollutants (toxics). They also noted broad opportunities for technological innovation and job creation potential in the methane mitigation sector.

Some key features introduced as part of the 2024 Methane Rule were 1) establishing leak monitoring requirements to ensure regular inspections at all sites, including low-producing and inactive sites; 2) eliminating routine flaring at new wells; and 3) finalizing the Super Emitter Program. This program would enable certified third parties — such as satellite emissions monitors — to submit data to the EPA, which would then verify the emissions' origin and notify the responsible party of its obligation to investigate and correct the problem.

The 2024 Methane Rule, however, has yet to be fully realized. It was originally supposed to be implemented in 2026, but the Trump Administration has delayed its enforcement while EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin has mounted an expansive deregulation agenda. Now, as of October 27, 2026, the EPA has proposed a new rule that will limit pollution-reducing regulations and data tracking efforts, as well as rescind the Super Emitter Program, which would have detected large methane leaks from oil

and gas facilities. This decision contradicts collaborative efforts that would have supported better public health outcomes, technological innovation, and job growth in the methane mitigation sector.

EHP's Statement

The 2024 Federal Methane Rule, as previously intended, was a commonsense public health policy that established a set of minimum protections for people living near oil and gas facilities. The U.S. EPA's new proposal to weaken these protections will expand the industry's ability to pollute and therefore increase health risks in communities across the country, including those in Pennsylvania, which is the nation's second-largest shale gas producer. Further weakening of these critical standards will exacerbate health risks for those closest to oil and gas production, locking in continued, unnecessary exposure to dangerous air pollution for years to come.

EHP has concerns about several aspects of this new rule, most notably the EPA's seemingly one-sided approach to developing modifications, which were informed by petitions the EPA received. The EPA's announcement mentioned accommodations for the oil and gas industry, members of which were consulted during the original rule's development. There was no clear mention of the EPA weighing alternate perspectives, such as voices from environmental, public health, and economic experts regarding the myriad benefits posed by the original rule. In fact, the EPA goes so far as to assert that this decision "does not concern human health effects" but is, instead, expected to "save the oil and natural gas industry … $208 million per year."

The savings touted for the oil and gas industry by cutting regulations will come at the expense of downwind residents and their communities. Residents can expect to see increased healthcare costs associated with more doctor visits and medications. Business communities can expect to see economic losses through more days of missed work and families leaving the area to escape pollution. The EPA claims that it will "unleash energy dominance" with its new decision, when it will, in fact, be unleashing more methane. And, contrary to the EPA's implication that this step will support U.S. leadership in clean energy, methane is a fossil fuel and is inherently *not* clean. For that reason, EHP opposes this new rule, particularly the elimination of the Super Emitter Program and the subcategorization of marginal wells.

The Super Emitter Program would have boosted the EPA's oversight of oil and gas facilities and would have helped identify high, short-term pollution events that contribute significantly to acute health impacts and to the industry's overall methane emissions. The EPA's justification for eliminating this program was related to its ineffectiveness, but it is important to note that the program was never actually launched, given the rule's implementation delay. To delay a program and then fault it for being ineffective is not a fair justification for removal.

Second, the proposed plan to subcategorize and weaken requirements for marginal wells will allow these sites to continue leaking methane to the atmosphere without sufficient regard to the resulting health and safety risks. Research demonstrates that while low-producing, or "marginal," wells are individually small in production, when combined they are responsible for nearly half of total U.S. methane emissions. In fact, the EPA has acknowledged that marginal wells contribute a disproportionate amount of emissions, but the agency does not offer an adequate alternative to effectively reduce those emissions should the requirements for marginal wells be weakened.

For decades, the gas industry has benefited from the misconception that methane is a clean fuel. Methane is a fossil fuel that leaks from oil and gas infrastructure, contributing to climate change. It carries with it hazardous substances — such as volatile organic compounds, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter — that pose health risks, especially to vulnerable populations, such as children, the elderly, and pregnant people. The EPA is tasked with protecting human health and the environment, but their decision to reduce or eliminate major components of the 2024 Methane Rule contradicts their own mission, the available science, and the input of numerous experts who were consulted during the original process.

The 2024 Methane Rule represented several meaningful steps in the right direction to limit methane's negative impacts on human health and the environment, and EHP condemns the EPA's recent actions to weaken such protections.

About EHP

The Environmental Health Project (EHP) is a nonprofit public health organization that defends public health in the face of shale gas development. EHP provides frontline communities with timely monitoring, interpretation, and guidance while engaging diverse stakeholders: health professionals, researchers, community organizers, public servants, and others.