Public Statement on Pennsylvania DEP Final Methane/VOC Rules

December 9, 2021

Background:

Today, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) released the final draft of rules to trim releases of smog-forming volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and climate warming methane from the state’s existing oil and gas well sites. However, the DEP will not require companies to find and fix leaks at tens of thousands of low-producing wells.

The rules are expected to take effect by the middle of next year. About a third of the planet’s warming from greenhouse gases today are attributed to human-caused emissions of methane, which traps more than 80 times as much heat as carbon dioxide over 20 years. In the U.S., about a third of methane emissions come from the oil and gas industry.

The new DEP rules will require some well owners to perform leak searches four times a year and upgrade equipment already in the field to cut down on pollution from controllers, pumps, compressors, and tanks. In total, the rules are expected to reduce emissions of VOCs by nearly 12,000 tons per year and of methane by about 214,000 tons per year. But stronger rules around low-producing wells and inspections could have doubled these numbers.

Statement from the Environmental Health Project:

The Environmental Health Project acknowledges the DEP for its work in finalizing the methane/VOC rule. However, when we consider that a stronger rule could have better protected the health of Pennsylvanians, we cannot celebrate it. The rule itself remains leaky, including loopholes that allow ample oil and gas emissions to continue unchecked, putting people who live near these operations at higher risk of adverse health impacts. We hope that, next time, the DEP will do better when considering the broad-reaching impacts of its decisions.

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