



Northern New Mexico Group

Rio Grande Chapter
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Submitted via email to: tspisak@blm.gov

To:

Jim Stovall, BLM NM Acting Associate State Director
Amanda Leiter, BLM Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management
Tim Spisak, BLM Senior Advisor

Comments Re: BLM Methane Rule

V.81, N.25 Fed. Reg. (Feb. 8, 2016)

**Waste Prevention, Production Subject to Royalties, and Resource Conservation:
Proposed Rule**

The 2,500 members of the Northern New Mexico Group of Sierra Club commend the Bureau of Land Management for the recently proposed Methane Rule. We appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of this long needed revision.

For 30 years under the current rule, methane has been leaked, emitted and flared into the air of northern New Mexico counties to the extent that our region has the largest methane concentration in the United States.

Costs to Northern New Mexico Communities from Methane

Lost royalties are a small part of the cost.

The estimated more than \$100 million (NM Congressional letter to Department of Interior, July 20, 2015) in lost revenue to New Mexico taxpayers and producers is minor compared to the ongoing economic and health risks faced by communities located near oil fields.

1. Toxic pollutants, such as benzene and known carcinogens, such as formaldehyde, are routinely released when methane is flared or leaked. Communities located in “Gas Zones” face loss of mortgages, loss of homeowners insurance, inability to qualify for loans and steep declines in property values.
(Dyer, J. (2013, December 19) “The Fracking – Real Estate conundrum”, Boulder Weekly)
2. Newborn infants exposed to benzene in the first trimester face life-long neurological impairment, heart defects and initial hospital stays averaging \$30,000.
 (“Compendium of Scientific, Medical and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking, (Unconventional Gas and Oil Extraction)”, Concerned Health Professionals of NY and Physicians for Social Responsibility, October 14, 2015)
3. Four common chemical pollutants routinely released with methane – benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene (BTEX) - are endocrine disruptors commonly found in ambient air that can interfere with human hormones at levels well below EPA exposure recommendation limits. Cardiovascular disease, respiratory dysfunction, asthma, sperm abnormalities and incomplete fetal growth are linked to BTEX.
(Boulden, A. et al (2015) “New look at BTEX”, Environmental Science & Technology, 49, 5261-76, doi)
4. Air pollution from methane leaks and emissions can contaminate air hundreds of miles from the well pad it originates from.
(Valentine, K. (2015, April 30) “Fracking wells could pollute the air hundreds of miles away”, ClimateProgress)
5. 8 highly toxic chemicals in air samples collected near well sites were proven human carcinogens and potent neurotoxicants (hexane and hydrogen sulfide). In 29 out of 76 samples, concentrations far exceeded federal health and safety standards.
(Neuhauser, A. (2014, October 30) “Toxic chemicals, carcinogens skyrocket near fracking sites”, US News and World Report)

There are over 2 million published studies, articles and books related to the impacts of fracking and associated methane and related VOC emissions on human health. The final health cost to Americans living near or downwind of oil and gas industry’s operations is unknown but will be enormous. This industry has been granted loopholes and permits to pollute and discharge into the public domain and private property for over a century. It has profited into the trillions of dollars and now regulation and pay back must follow.

We strongly support the following language in the BLM Methane Rule and request the federal government hold fast to this proposed set of requirements.

Excerpt from the Summary (Federal Register, Vol. 81, No. 25, Part II, page 4)

The BLM must ensure that it has modern, effective requirements to govern oil and gas operations on BLM- administered leases. Second, as a practical matter, neither the EPA nor State regulations adequately address the issue of waste of gas from BLM- administered leases. The EPA regulations are directed at air pollution reduction, not waste prevention; they focus largely on new sources; and they do not address all avenues for reducing waste

(for example, they do not impose flaring limits for associated gas). Similarly, no State has established a comprehensive set of requirements addressing all three avenues for waste—flaring, venting, and leaks—and only a few States have significant requirements addressing all three avenues for waste –flaring, venting and leaks – and only a few states have significant requirements in even one of these areas. It is wholly within the BLM’s statutory authority to address flaring, venting and leaks in its capacity as land manager with a responsibility to ensure the longevity and long term productivity of public lands and resources (see Part I.B. Preamble).

The BLM proposes to address gas losses from existing storage vessels, which are **not** covered by the EPA standards. The BLM believes that reducing venting from existing storage vessels, which have higher rates of venting, is a reasonably cost-effective means of reducing gas losses. Rather than establishing new and separate standards for venting from existing vessels, we have been informed by operators that it would be easier to comply if we simply require existing vessels on BLM-administered leases to meet standards that are the same as the EPA standards that already apply to new and modified vessels on those leases.

Summary of Comments


The oil and gas industry has avoided the direct pollution costs of unconventional gas and oil extraction for decades.

A fundamental loss of human health and economic viability has been the price of extreme fuel extraction methods and lack of sufficient government regulation.

The rise of infant mortality, birth defects, respiratory failure, cardiovascular disease, asthma, cancer and stunted neurological development are air pollution impacts that money often cannot cure. The loss of mortgages, bank loans, insurance and the ability to sell and move are financial impacts that the private residents pay for the oil company’s “right” to do business nearby on public lands.

The Methane Rule will not correct all these issues, but it is a recognizable start. We appreciate the BLM’s approach to the problem and strongly support the Methane Rule.

Sincerely,



Teresa Seamster, Ed.S.
Northern New Mexico Group Chair
Rio Grande Chapter of Sierra Club