New BLM Methane Rule Reverses 2016 Methane Waste Prevention Rule Environmental Safeguards

On September 18, 2018 the Department of Interior (DOI) announced that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had finalized their new Methane Waste Prevention Rule, reversing all pollution prevention measures that had been laid out in the 2016 Obama era Methane Waste Prevention Rule. DOI says that the new rule will "reduce unnecessary burdens on the private sector." This reversal of the 2016 Methane Waste Rule comes as part of the Trump Administration's continued efforts to reduce "regulatory burdens" and encourage "energy dominance." However, this agenda fails to acknowledge the severe economic, environmental, and health impacts that unregulated leaking, venting, and flaring of methane from gas wells pose to the American people.

Waste Prevention Rule
Methane is a potent greenhouse gas that is often released from natural gas wells through leaks, venting, and flaring -- which is the burning of excess gas. It has been found that oil and gas companies waste $330 million worth of natural gas each year due to unregulated leaking, venting, and flaring from wells. Additionally, taxpayers are losing millions of dollars every year from this wasted natural gas. Not only is this costing taxpayers and nearby western communities significant loss in revenue, but it is allowing the consistent leaking of harmful emissions into the air. These methane leaks are dangerous for both our atmosphere and human health.

The 2016 Methane Rule proposed by the Obama Administration came after extensive studies and public input. The Rule would have required companies drilling on public lands to more regularly check for leaks and fix them after 30 days if detected. This not only would save American taxpayers millions of dollars, but also would have kept large amounts of methane pollution out of the atmosphere. It's common sense that DOI and BLM are disregarding -- less leaked gas means more in the pipes and more to sell. In fact, some companies are taking their own action -- Shell announced that they would be implementing regulations and technologies of their own to reduce methane waste to 0.02%. Consistent, government-wide standards would allow smaller and medium sized
Attempts to Repeal the 2016 Rule
The Trump Administration came up against several hurdles when they announced that they would be revising the Methane Rule. In one instance last year, Republicans in Congress attempted to use the Congressional Review Act to halt the implementation of the 2016 Methane Waste Rule. This attempt fell short even though it only required a simple majority in the Senate and House. This points to the lack of support for the repeal from members of Congress. The announcement of this final rule comes despite bipartisan opposition in Congress and a half–million Americans submitting comments in opposition to the rollback. Secretary Zinke has again chosen to side with the lobbyists in Washington – prioritizing oil and gas company profits over the American public’s interest in clean air.

What This Means for Your Community
Methane emissions are dangerous and costly for everyone, however residents of mountain communities that reside close to public lands where oil and gas extraction occurs experience some of the worse health impacts. This rollback means more wasted energy and more pollution that threatens the health and livelihoods of those in nearby communities.

The new rule will be implemented 60 days after it's announcement, unless legal action can delay it's implementation. New Mexico and California attorneys general have already filed lawsuits against the Trump Administration an attempt to hold the Administration accountable for yet another environmental rollback.

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