



Critical First Step in Reducing Methane Emissions

January 14, 2015—[The Environmental and Energy Study Institute](#) (EESI) salutes the Obama administration’s decision to tackle methane emissions, a topic recently covered in an [EESI Congressional briefing](#). Methane is a powerful climate warming pollutant – at least 84 times more powerful than carbon dioxide over the first 20 years of its presence in the atmosphere. Because of its potency, reducing methane emissions can reduce the rate of warming substantially in the near term. Nevertheless, controls on carbon and methane emissions are both necessary if we want to slow the rate of warming and limit total warming.

According to EESI Executive Director Carol Werner, *“This is a key step on the road to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. Methane is a particularly potent greenhouse gas, and reducing fugitive methane emissions is essential if we are to keep global warming below two degrees Celsius. Cutting methane emissions buys us valuable time as we cut back our carbon emissions. Methane leaks also pose grave safety and health risks, and represent an economic loss. But this is only a first step: we must do more to address methane emissions from existing sources.”*

The administration announced several methane initiatives today, including a goal to cut methane emissions from the oil and gas sector 40 to 45 percent from 2012 levels by 2025. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will set standards for methane emissions from new and modified production, processing, and transmission facilities in the oil and gas sector. EPA is expected to issue a proposed rule this summer, with a final rule to follow in 2016. The initial EPA rule will not cover existing sources of methane emissions; however, the Department of Interior announced it will restrict emissions from existing sources on public lands through their own set of regulations.

Methane is a short-lived climate pollutant (SLCP) that EPA estimates comprises nearly 10 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. There are many sources of methane (including agriculture, landfills, industrial processes...), but the oil and gas sector is one of the larger ones: it represents nearly 30 percent of all methane emissions, and is also one of the easier sources to address. There are serious leakages throughout the entire oil and gas production and pipeline distribution infrastructure. In many cases, investing in the equipment and practices necessary to reduce leakage can actually lead to cost savings. The administration estimates that achieving its methane goals “would save up to 180 billion cubic feet of natural gas in 2025, enough to heat more than 2 million homes for a year.” Reducing leakages would also lead to safer operations and better public safety, as methane is particularly flammable and can cause explosions.

Although the knowhow needed to reduce methane leakages is well known and cost effective (plugging leaks usually boosts profits), many in the oil and gas industry are privileging investments in capacity instead. That is why government action is needed.

SOURCES:

[White House Fact Sheet: “Administration Takes Steps Forward on Climate Action Plan by Announcing Actions to Cut Methane Emissions”](#)

[EESI October 30 Briefing: The Economic and Climate Implications of Methane Emissions from the Oil & Gas Sector](#)

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