



AIR POLLUTION FROM THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

EARTHWORKS FACT SHEET

The U.S. oil and gas industry pollutes the air with methane and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). [EPA announced in January 2015](#) that, in addition to voluntary measures, it will propose rules to require the industry reduce this pollution.

Leaks, [flaring](#), and venting of this pollution occurs throughout the production, transmission and distribution chain because industry hasn't been required to stop it by force of law. For years companies and trade groups have claimed they can easily do so, but haven't.

Climate Impacts

The U.S. oil and gas industry annually pollutes the air with almost 8 million metric tons of methane according to [EPA's most recent inventory](#). And EPA's inventory [has been proven to be a vast underestimation](#), the extent of which is still being determined through independent research.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [methane is 86 times more potent a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide over 20 years](#). EPA predicts that [oil and gas industry methane pollution will increase 25% over the next decade](#).

There is a strong argument that [oil and gas development as currently regulated is worse for the climate than coal](#).

Health Impacts

In association with methane emissions, the oil and gas industry pollutes the air with different gases that threaten human health:

- [Volatile Organic Compounds \(VOCs\) including carcinogens such as benzene.](#)
- [VOCs and NOx compounds \(nitric oxide and nitrogen dioxide\) combine with sunlight and produce smog](#), which is hazardous to human health and can cause premature death.
- [Hydrogen sulfide gas can cause breathing difficulty as well as eye and throat irritation](#). High levels of exposure is fatal and has killed several oil and gas workers.

Because fracking and other oil and gas development facilities can be sited very close to homes (e.g. Montana requires no setback, meaning they can be directly adjacent), families living with oil and gas development nearby [report](#) incidents of:

- asthma,
- respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses,
- autoimmune diseases,
- liver failure,
- cancer,
- headaches,
- nausea,
- sleeplessness, and other ailments.



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The Solution

The Environmental Protection Agency has the power under the [Clean Air Act](#) and other laws to require the oil and gas industry to reduce its air pollution.

Strong new rules would bring important public health benefits for communities located near energy development by simultaneously cutting smog-forming and cancer-causing pollutants released from oil and gas development.

Strong rules reducing methane pollution are essential if we are to avoid catastrophic global climate change.

It is time to force the oil and gas industry to internalize the cost of doing business, as opposed to forcing communities to pay the price for living near oil and gas development.



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