

# Roth: Oil and Gas Companies Help Regulate Methane

Colorado has become the first state to regulate methane emissions from its oil and gas industry. More interestingly, it's the first one to do so with the help of the oil and gas industry.

As most Americans know by now, natural gas is a cleaner-burning domestic resource that is helping our country reduce its industrial and power plant pollutions. It is helping in many other ways, as well. Yet, aspects of natural gas deserve some care.

Natural gas is made primarily of methane. Gas leaks can lead to methane emission. Methane is the second-most-prevalent greenhouse gas in the U.S. This is problematic because methane's effect on climate change is more than 20 times greater than carbon dioxide. While methane has a shorter lifetime in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide, it's 84 times stronger than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere over the first 20 years after emission.

Colorado's new collaborative regulation requires oil and gas companies to follow stricter methane leak detection standards. Oil and gas companies in Colorado must find and fix methane leaks from tanks and pipes. Oil and gas companies must also install leak control technology that will capture 95 percent of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, including methane. These steps will help greatly.

It's estimated that the new regulation will reduce more than 100,000 tons of methane each year and 90,000 tons of smog-creating VOCs. This reduction is equivalent to removing all Colorado cars and trucks from the road for a year. That's a lot.

Notably, this regulation was supported by three of Colorado's largest oil and gas producers – Anadarko Petroleum, Noble Energy and Encna. These companies worked with the Environmental Defense Fund to draft the rules. While acknowledging that Colorado's new rules were strict, Noble Vice President Ted Brown said he thought the rules were smart, and that they ensure that oil and gas is developed in the safest possible way for communities and the environment.

Natural gas is a vital resource that allows us to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by replacing coal power plants with natural gas plants. Natural gas power plants emit about half as much carbon dioxide as coal power plants, less than a third as much nitrogen oxide, and only 1 percent as much sulfur oxides as coal plants. Coal remains the single greatest cause of greenhouse gas effects and we need natural gas to help curb the negative effects.

Colorado has set an innovative example for how to practice environmental responsibility while at the same time fostering a strong oil and gas industry, showing that the two are not mutually exclusive. More states could follow Colorado's example. Focusing on reducing methane leaks will make natural gas production more efficient and more environmentally responsible, thus increasing its already sizable environmental advantages over coal. For gas-producing states like Colorado, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and beyond, the path seems worthwhile.

Complicated issues like methane emissions will continue to call for sensible, balanced approaches to move us toward a cleaner energy future. No country is better at facing such challenges, and the best approaches happen when industry and environmentalists work together and help lead the way.