



EPA's Proposal to Reduce Climate- and Health-Harming Pollution from the Oil and Natural Gas Industry: Addressing Environmental Justice Concerns

November 2, 2021- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is taking a significant step in fighting the climate crisis and protecting public health through a proposed rule that would **sharply reduce methane and other harmful air pollutants from both new and existing sources in the oil and natural gas industry**. The oil and natural gas sector is the nation's largest source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, and is a leading source of smog-forming volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and air toxics such as benzene.

EPA's proposed rule would **expand and strengthen New Source Performance Standards** for methane and VOCs from new, modified and reconstructed sources, and **establish the first Emission Guidelines requiring regulation of methane from hundreds of thousands of existing sources nationwide**. It also includes requirements for states to undertake **meaningful outreach and engagement with overburdened and underserved communities** as they develop their plans.

The Agency **conducted extensive public outreach to hear from the public and a wide range of stakeholder groups**. The proposed rule reflects input from heard from **diverse voices and perspectives**, including communities affected by oil and gas pollution.

EPA intends to issue a **supplemental proposal** in 2022 and is seeking information about additional sources of pollution that may help the Agency **further reduce methane and VOC emissions from the oil and natural gas sector**.

Communities with environmental justice concerns, including low-income communities and communities of color, **often bear an unequal burden of environmental risk and harm** – both from climate change and from air pollution. This fact sheet provides information on **how the proposal would benefit communities**, and key results of an analysis EPA conducted of the **impact of oil and gas operations on communities with environmental justice concerns**. The fact sheet also **outlines opportunities to provide comments on EPA's proposal, along with proposed opportunities** to provide feedback on states' plans for existing sources.

Key Aspects of the Proposal That Would Benefit Communities with Environmental Justice Concerns

Addressing methane pollution

- EPA’s proposal would expand and strengthen New Source Performance Standards for methane and smog-forming volatile organic compounds from new, modified and reconstructed sources, and establish the first Emission Guidelines requiring regulation of methane from hundreds of thousands of existing sources nationwide.
- Combined, these actions will reduce methane emissions by an estimated 41 million tons through 2035 -- the equivalent of 920 million metric tons of carbon dioxide. That’s more than the amount of carbon dioxide emitted in 2019 from all U.S. passenger cars and commercial aircraft combined. In 2030 alone, the proposed rule would reduce methane emissions from covered sources by an estimated 74 percent compared to emissions from those sources in 2005.

Reducing Health Impacts in Communities Near Oil and Gas Operations

- In addition to methane, air pollution from oil and natural gas facilities includes smog-forming VOCs, and a number of hazardous air pollutants (also called “air toxics,”) that are known or suspected to cause cancer and other serious health effects.
- If finalized as proposed, EPA’s rule would sharply reduce this pollution through rigorous guidelines for pollution sources at new and existing facilities, including facilities that can be near the places where people live, work and go to school. These include: requirements for finding and fixing leaks, requirements for controlling emissions of “associated gas” from oil wells, measures to reduce pollution from new and existing storage tanks, zero-emission standards for pneumatic controllers, and standards for liquids unloading events.
- The overall proposal would avoid 12 million tons of smog-forming VOC pollution and 480,000 tons of air toxics pollution from regulated sources through 2035. In 2030 alone, the proposed rule would cut emissions of these harmful pollutants in half in compared to expected emissions without the rule.
- EPA believes the proposed standards would reduce air pollution and deliver stronger health protection to people who live and work near oil and gas facilities, including in communities with environmental justice concerns.

Addressing Larger Leaks Faster

- EPA is proposing a comprehensive monitoring program that would require companies to find and fix leaks (known as “fugitive emissions”) at new and existing well sites and compressor stations.
- The program is designed to focus monitoring efforts on sites and equipment that are most likely to have large emissions. EPA is proposing routine monitoring and repair at hundreds of thousands of well sites that account for approximately 86 percent of fugitive emissions from wells, and at all new and existing compressor stations.
- EPA’s proposal would specifically require fugitive emissions monitoring at equipment that is prone to malfunction, including flares and storage vessels, to detect and stop large leaks.
- The proposal encourages innovation by giving owners and operators the flexibility to use advanced technologies that can find major leaks more rapidly and at lower cost than ever before. EPA is also taking comment on whether these advanced technologies should be required at all well sites and compressor stations.
- As part of the proposal, EPA is seeking information on how it could empower communities to help stem large emission events by detecting and reporting them to owners/operators for follow up and emission-reduction actions.

Oil and Gas Impacts on Communities with Environmental Justice Concerns

- EPA is confident that the proposed rule, and the reductions in pollution it would achieve, would improve public health protection in communities living near oil and gas facilities, including communities with environmental justice concerns.
- EPA’s proposed rule will significantly reduce emissions of climate-warming methane from the oil and gas industry. It also will reduce VOCs, which contribute to harmful smog and fine particle pollution. In addition, the emission controls that would be required in the rule will reduce a number of air toxics (also called hazardous air pollutants). Air toxics are pollutants known or suspected to cause cancer and other serious health effects.
- A detailed assessment of community-level benefits of the proposed rule is not available. However, to provide information on the potential impacts of the oil and natural gas industry on communities with environmental justice concerns, EPA conducted “baseline” analyses to determine if certain environmental justice concerns existed. These analyses included impacts of the oil and gas industry as a whole, not just the equipment and activities covered by EPA’s rules.
- Those analyses showed that Hispanic populations, Native Americans, and children 17 and younger may experience disproportional exposures to ozone pollution from VOC emissions

from the oil and natural gas industry. The analyses also showed that more Hispanic people, and slightly more children ages 17 and younger, may live in communities with potentially elevated cancer risk from oil- and gas-related air toxics emissions compared to the national population (the term elevated risk means that 1 in 10,000 people may develop cancer being exposed to air toxics 24 hour a day for 70 years). In addition, EPA's analyses also showed that Hispanic households spend a larger portion of their income on energy than non-Hispanic households.

- EPA is seeking comments on key assumptions used in the environmental justice analysis, along with data and information that would allow the Agency to conduct a more detailed analysis of risk in the future.
- The agency also is seeking information, analysis, and comment on how the proposed rule would affect air pollution and health in communities with environmental justice concerns, and whether there are additional requirements EPA should consider that would enhance the health and environmental benefits of the proposed rule for these communities.

EPA Wants to Hear Communities' Views

EPA wants to continue engaging with communities on the proposed rule throughout the rulemaking process. Here are some opportunities to learn more and to provide input:

Learning More About EPA's Proposal

- The Agency is offering a two-day training November 16 and 17 for member of communities and tribal nations. The training will provide background information on the oil and gas production process, an overview of the proposed rule, panel discussions with environmental justice communities, and tribes, and information on how to effectively engage in the regulatory process. To register to attend, visit <https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry>

Commenting on EPA's Proposal

- Once the proposal is published in the Federal Register, the public will have 60 days to submit written comments to EPA in writing. EPA also will hold a virtual public hearing. The hearing dates will be announced on EPA's website when the proposal is published.

Providing Input on State Plans

- States currently are required to hold at least one public hearing before adopting a plan to regulate existing sources under the Emissions Guidelines and submitting it to EPA for review. To ensure that the needs and perspectives of communities are taken into account,

EPA's proposal also includes requirements for states to undertake meaningful outreach and engagement with overburdened and underserved communities as they develop their plans.

- EPA's actions on state plans occurs through notice-and-comment rulemakings. When EPA proposes to approve or disapprove a plan, it will issue a proposal for public review and comment. In addition, if the Agency finalizes disapproval of any aspect of the state plan, it must issue a federal plan for designated facilities in that state through notice-and-comment rulemaking and with an opportunity for a public hearing.

For More Information

- To read the proposal, additional fact sheets, and for instructions on submitting comments, visit: <https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry>