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PA Department of Environmental Protection Hearing - June 24, 2020



Testimony for Control of VOC Emissions from Oil and Natural Gas Sources

My name is Angelo Taranto, I live in Allegheny County and am a member of Allegheny County Clean Air Now (ACCAN). Our communities suffer from poor air quality and the health effects of that poor air quality. We work for better regulation of industries on and near Neville Island in the Ohio River northwest of Pittsburgh.

I am speaking to testify about the climate and health crises to which Methane emissions from oil and natural gas sources contribute.

The Climate Crisis

We're facing a climate crisis. The devastating impacts of climate change are beyond dispute. Methane, the main component of natural gas, is a greenhouse gas that is 86 times more damaging at trapping heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. Pennsylvania's oil and gas industry emits hundreds of thousands of tons of methane each year. Reports have revealed that methane emissions and accidents are underreported to the government. As the third largest greenhouse gas polluting state in the nation, Pennsylvania bears an outsize responsibility for addressing our climate crisis.

There's no reason to do just the bare minimum given the extent of the methane problem in Pennsylvania. The Department of Environmental Protection must strengthen its proposed regulation to control emissions from existing oil and gas operations by

- (1) Removing the exemptions for natural gas wells that produce a low amount of gas. These low-producing wells can actually emit just as much methane or more than higher producing wells. When aggregated the emissions from these wells also generate a significant amount of emissions.
- (2) Removing the provision that allows operators to avoid their responsibility to inspect their equipment frequently just because previous inspections did not reveal significant leaks. Continued vigilance and monitoring is the only way we can ensure there are no breakdowns that threaten the intent of these regulations.

For Pennsylvania to be a leader on climate change and meet its commitment of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the regulations must address all areas where significant methane reductions can be achieved. Pennsylvania must demonstrate environmental leadership by strengthening and finalizing as soon as possible regulations to mitigate methane from existing fossil fuel operations.

The Health Crisis

In addition to the disastrous effects that methane has on climate, methane is also a component of VOCs that are having real health impacts right now. Reducing those exposures will have both a short-term and long-term effect on the health of Pennsylvania residents. VOC exposures affect infants and children as well as adults and, in fact, can have a greater physiologic impact on children.

You don't have to live near a gas well to feel the health impacts of the oil and gas industry. Pollution can travel long distances. In Allegheny County we are harmed by emissions not only from gas wells in Allegheny County, but from those in adjacent counties, compounding our existing air quality problems and increasing ozone or smog, resulting in thousands of additional asthma attacks each year. This is further compounded by the higher temperatures brought on by climate change which make smog worse, threatening adults and children with respiratory or cardiac issues.

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