



Opinion

Strong methane rules will bring health, job, and environmental benefits

The Canadian government must ensure that any provincial approach achieves equal or greater reductions than what the federal regulations would provide.



Tim Gray, Jerry Dias & Kim Perrotta

Opinion

Federal regulations to reduce methane emissions from oil and gas facilities will soon be finalized. Reducing methane pollution has important health, environmental and job benefits, which is why these regulations must be implemented quickly and be at least as ambitious as our neighbours in the U.S.

First of all, methane emissions from oil and gas facilities are often linked with many other chemicals that can be very harmful to human health. When methane is vented from, or leaks out of, wells, pumps, pipelines, and other equipment at oil and gas facilities, a number of other harmful chemicals can escape too.

Some of these chemicals, such as hydrogen sulphide, present immediate safety concerns because they can accumulate to high concentrations in confined spaces or low lying areas and cause accidental deaths. This is a significant concern for workers at oil and gas facilities, but it can also be a concern for people who live near those facilities.

Other chemicals, such as nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), contribute to smog that aggravates the lungs and eyes. In addition, a number of VOCs can be directly toxic. Benzene, for example, is a well known carcinogen that can increase the risk of cancer at very low doses.

Action taken to reduce methane emissions will protect human health by reducing the release of all of these air pollutants.

Second, methane is a potent greenhouse gas, more than 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide for a period of 20 years after its release. Because of methane's ability to increase temperatures over the short term, reducing emissions can have near-immediate positive impacts by avoiding warming and keeping the planet further away from dangerous climate change impacts.

The flip side is that methane is also a resource that we continue to depend upon. After all, methane is the main component in natural gas, which many Canadians use to heat their homes and utilities burn to produce electricity.

So every methane leak from an oil and gas facility represents a wasted resource. Every oil and gas company that uses pumps or compressors that intention-

ally release methane as part of normal operations is throwing money out the window.

The Government of Alberta alone is losing \$21-million in royalty revenue every year because of the methane that is allowed to escape from oil and gas facilities.

The methane that is lost to the atmosphere from Canadian oil and gas operations could heat almost every home in Alberta.

Reducing methane emissions also has another economic benefit: job creation. Detecting and repairing methane leaks involves hiring highly skilled workers. So does replacing equipment that intentionally leaks with newer, existing equipment that doesn't.

There are more than 180 companies operating in Canada that work to reduce methane emissions in the oil and gas sector. Some have expanded operations in U.S. states that passed methane regulations years ago. All are waiting for Canadian regulations to provide the same opportunities at home.

Many of the solutions for reducing methane leaks are either free or very cheap. Almost half of the methane emissions that companies acknowledge are vented to the atmosphere can be reduced at no net cost. That's because the value of the methane that is captured and

sold into the market pays for existing, non-leak technology and the additional workers needed to install it.

And that's why the methane regulations proposed by the federal government will result in \$11.7-billion in net benefits to the Canadian economy. It's also why a number of large, global oil and gas companies, including ones that operate in Canada, have voluntarily committed to actions that would reduce methane leaks and intentional releases.

For all these reasons—health, environmental and job benefits—methane regulations at oil and gas facilities should be welcomed. The federal gov-



Environment Minister Catherine McKenna. The federal government must remain committed to achieving its methane emission reduction target by passing regulations as soon as possible that are as strong or stronger than those proposed last spring. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

ernment must remain committed to achieving its methane emission reduction target by passing regulations as soon as possible that are as strong or stronger than those proposed last spring. Just as importantly, the Canadian government must ensure that any provincial approach achieves equal or greater reductions than what the federal regulations would provide.

Tim Gray is executive director of Environmental Defence. Jerry Dias is national president of Unifor. Kim Perrotta is executive director of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment.

The Hill Times