

# Figuring out methane's role in the climate puzzle

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The U.S. may be on the verge of an economy driven by methane, the primary component of natural gas, which burns cleaner than coal and is undergoing a production boom. It has poised the country as a top fuel producer globally, but recent research is casting serious doubts over just how climate-friendly it is, according to an article in *Chemical & Engineering News* (C&EN), the weekly news magazine of the American Chemical Society.

In the article, Jeff Johnson, a senior correspondent at C&EN, explains that when burned as a fuel to produce electricity, [methane](#) emits about half as much carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), a major greenhouse gas, as [coal](#). But not all methane gets burned as fuel. Some of the gas is released, either through leaks or intentional venting from oil and gas wells, into the atmosphere. Although it is present in much smaller amounts in the atmosphere compared to CO<sub>2</sub>—the primary target for climate change regulations—methane has 86 times more global warming potential. And estimates vary significantly over just how much is escaping into the air.

To get a better handle on the methane picture, researchers are planning more detailed studies to estimate the gas's emissions from oil and gas operations. In parallel, the Environmental Protection Agency, which has so far been reluctant to directly regulate methane emissions, plans to review the situation. If deemed necessary, the agency would propose new regulations by 2016.

**More information:** "Methane's Role in Climate Change" -

[cen.acs.org/articles/92/i27/Me ... -Climate-Change.html](https://cen.acs.org/articles/92/i27/Me...-Climate-Change.html)

Provided by American Chemical Society

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