

US unveils first federal methane regulations

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US President Barack Obama (L) speaks with EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy (R) during a meeting at the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan in Flint, Michigan, May 4, 2016

The United States on Thursday unveiled the first federal regulations on methane—a powerful greenhouse gas that accelerates global warming—aimed at reducing emissions from new oil and gas operations.

The Environmental Protection Agency rules are part of President Barack Obama's plan to fight climate change, curb pollution and protect public

health, the agency said.

"Today, we are underscoring the administration's commitment to finding common sense ways to cut methane," said EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy.

"Together these new actions will protect [public health](#) and reduce pollution linked to cancer and other serious health effects while allowing industry to continue to grow and provide a vital source of energy for Americans across the country."

The move means that EPA has now finalized a set of standards to reduce methane, [volatile organic compounds](#) (VOCs) and toxic air emissions in any new and modified operations in the oil and natural gas industry.

A second phase has also begun in which the EPA will eventually control emissions from existing sources, the agency said.

The move keeps the US government "on track to achieve its goal of cutting [methane emissions](#) from the oil and gas sector by 40 to 45 percent from 2012 levels by 2025," the EPA said.

Methane is a key component of natural gas, and it is 25 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in terms of fueling global warming.

It is the second most common greenhouse gas emitted in the United States as a result of human activities, with nearly one-third of its emissions coming from oil production and the production, transmission and distribution of [natural gas](#), the EPA said.

The new rules extend to methane from hydraulically fractured oil wells and equipment that was not regulated in 2012.

The EPA has received more than 900,000 comments since it first released its proposal in August 2015, and "updated a number of aspects in the final rule that increase climate benefits, including removing an exemption for low production wells and requiring leak monitoring surveys twice as often at compressor stations, which have the potential for significant emissions," said the agency.

The EPA estimated the final rule would cost about \$530 million by 2025, and would yield climate benefits of \$690 million.

The final standards for both new and modified sources are expected to reduce 510,000 short tons of methane in 2025, the equivalent of reducing 11 million metric tons of [carbon dioxide](#), the agency said.

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