

# Obama-era clean-air rule on methane emissions blocked again (Update)

April 5 2018, by Matthew Daly

---

An on-again, off-again effort to restrict harmful methane emissions on federal lands is off—again.

A federal judge in Wyoming has halted the clean-air rule indefinitely, saying it "makes little sense" to force oil and gas companies to comply with the Obama-era rule when the Trump administration has moved to roll back the 2016 regulation.

The Interior Department is accepting comments on its proposed rewrite and expects to issue a final rule this summer.

In the meantime, Judge Scott Skavdahl said enforcing the earlier rule would provide "minimal public benefit" while imposing potentially significant costs on industry.

"Sadly, and frustratingly, this case is symbolic of the dysfunction in the current state of administrative law," Skavdahl wrote in an 11-page opinion Wednesday in Casper, Wyoming. "Unfortunately, it is not the first time this dysfunction has frustrated the administrative review process in this court."

Skavdahl's ruling is the latest in a back-and-forth series of court decisions and administrative actions as the Trump administration tries to weaken or delay a rule imposed in the waning days of the Obama administration.

The November 2016 rule forced energy companies to capture methane gas burned off or wasted at drilling sites on public lands.

Methane emissions are a key contributor to climate change. Methane, the main component of natural gas, is far more potent at trapping heat than carbon dioxide but does not stay in the air as long.

Many companies consider the federal rule unnecessary and overly intrusive and note that companies have an economic to capture the methane so they can sell it.

A federal judge in San Francisco reinstated the rule in February, even as the Trump administration proposed a new one that would significantly weaken the original.

Courts in Wyoming and California have issued conflicting opinions on the rule, and a bid by Congress to overturn the measure failed in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Dan Naatz, vice president of government affairs for the Independent Petroleum Association of America, cheered the latest court decision.

"A new rule is coming out," he said. "The agency is taking comments on it now." Trying to enforce Obama-era rule in the meantime would only cause confusion, he added.

But Peter Zalzal, a lawyer for the Environmental Defense Fund, said the ruling "effectively punishes" law-abiding companies that have been complying with the new standards, "while rewarding those in the oil and gas industry that are recklessly wasting a valuable public resource and squandering tax payers' hard-earned money."

The environmental group pledged to appeal the case, likely ensuring

another legal round in the much-litigated case.

© 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Obama-era clean-air rule on methane emissions blocked again (Update) (2018, April 5) retrieved 19 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-04-obama-era-clean-air-methane-emissions-blocked.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.