

Watchdog: Fossil fuel firms need to curb climate gas leaks

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In this undated file photo the Trans-Alaska pipeline and pump station north of Fairbanks, Alaska is shown. The International Energy Agency says oil and gas companies aren't doing enough to reduce the release of methane, a potent source of planet-heating emissions, that is seeping out of pipelines and production plants. (AP Photo/Al Grillo, file)

The International Energy Agency says oil and gas companies aren't doing enough to reduce the release of methane, a potent source of planet-heating emissions, that is seeping out of pipelines and production plants.

A report published Monday by the Paris-based organization found the estimated 10% drop in methane emissions from oil and gas companies last year was largely due to lower production amid a global decline in demand due to the coronavirus pandemic.

It warned that the amount of methane released into the atmosphere as part of the production process for fossil fuels could rebound again as economies recover, and called on countries and companies to do more to plug those leaks.

While carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels are the main source of greenhouse gases, methane contributes significantly to the problem as well because it is so much more effective than CO₂ at trapping heat in the atmosphere.

The IEA said its Methane Tracker report suggests the oil and gas industry worldwide emitted more than 70 million metric tons of methane last year, equivalent to the total energy-related CO₂ emissions from the 27-nation European Union.

"There is no good reason to allow these harmful leaks to continue, and there is every reason for responsible operators to ensure that they are addressed," the agency's executive director, Fatih Birol, was quoted as saying.

He added that governments could also help tackle the problem with more effective industry regulation.

Satellite imaging has become an increasingly important tool in

pinpointing the source of manmade methane emissions in recent years.

The report cited data by analytics firm Kayrros showing that methane emissions decreased in Iraq, Kuwait, Turkmenistan and the United States last year, while increasing in Algeria, Kazakhstan and Russia, which saw a 32% rise in 2020 compared with the previous year.

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