

Methane plume above New Mexico gas wells spotted from space

October 13 2021, by Josh Saul and Gerson Freitas Jr.



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A large cloud of planet-warming methane was detected in the natural gas-rich San Juan Basin in New Mexico by geanalytics company Kayrros SAS.

A large number of gas companies operate wells and pipelines in the area where a satellite saw the billowing greenhouse gas. The plume's shape indicates that it may come from several mid-sized sources rather than a big one, according to Kayrros.

The [methane](#) appeared to be above a gas well operated by Hilcorp Energy Co. as well as near gas pipelines operated by companies including Enterprise Products Partners LP and Kinder Morgan Inc. There are also [coal mines](#) in the area that could be a source of the plume, Kayrros said.

Kinder Morgan said it can't verify the plume is due to a release on its system, and that it has "practices in place to limit natural gas releases that occur during planned and unplanned maintenance activities." An Enterprise representative said the [company](#) didn't have any assets at the coordinates provided by Kayrros. Hilcorp didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

Stopping intentional releases and accidental leaks of methane, the main component of natural gas, could do more to slow climate change than almost any other single measure. Two dozen countries on Monday joined the U.S. and the European Union's pact to pare global methane emissions by 30% before the end of the decade. Methane has more than 80 times the warming impact of carbon dioxide over the short term.

Kayrros relied on a Sept. 21 observation from the European Space Agency and estimated an emissions rate of 39 tons of methane an hour was needed to generate the release.

Representatives for the New Mexico Environment Department and the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department didn't have immediate comment.

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