

# Industry should curb waste of methane gas

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New Mexico leads the nation in methane waste from oil and gas operations on America's public and tribal lands. It's not a proud badge to wear, but it is a business opportunity waiting to happen.

This month, ICF International, a consulting firm specializing in energy issues, released a report showing that New Mexico has the highest methane emissions on federal and tribal lands of any state in the nation.

Since methane is the primary component in the natural gas sold at market, every year New Mexico is wasting more than \$100 million worth of usable gas – enough natural gas to meet the energy needs of more than one-third of New Mexico's households.

To put this in a regional context, we are wasting as much methane as what's being lost by the energy producing states of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, North Dakota and Montana combined.

That's why the Partnership for Responsible Business wants the public to know that the U.S. Bureau of Land management can set strong rules that cut methane waste on public and tribal lands and actively work with the business community to discover ways to generate more energy revenues, create jobs and keep our air pure. This is a triple bottom-line win for New Mexico's state economy.

A lot of that methane waste comes from gas that is flared or vented at well sites or leaky pipes and equipment. The good news is that we can cost-effectively address waste and inefficiencies in New Mexico's oil and gas industry and actually grow and strengthen our state economy.

There are businesses today that have the technology and know-how to capture methane and put it to good use heating homes, creating electricity, powering cars or even meeting the needs for drilling operations on site.

The technologies that find and fix methane leaks already exist and many operators have put them to good use, proving their cost-effectiveness. For example, western neighbors such as Colorado and Wyoming require regular leak detection inspections at oil and gas facilities.

These states have learned that taking action to cut methane creates jobs in the methane mitigation industry — the companies that service the oil and gas industry, train the inspectors and manufacture the high-tech tools that are used to find and fix leaks.

Unfortunately, New Mexico lags both Colorado and Wyoming in these types of jobs, which are high-skilled and high-paying. Moreover, the BLM has a major role to play given the amount of energy development it oversees on public and tribal lands in New Mexico and throughout the West.

The ICF International report isn't the first time New Mexico has heard about a methane problem. A giant methane cloud looms over the Four Corners region. Leading scientists from NASA and NOAA are studying this problem. Plus, the oil and gas industry itself has reported they contribute the largest amount of methane waste in the San Juan Basin.

It's clear we need a comprehensive approach to stop the wasteful practice of venting and flaring methane, and we have to find and fix these leaks.

Taking on this challenge not only benefits New Mexico's economy, but it will also clean up our air. When companies fix methane leaks they will also help cut other types of air pollution such as ozone-forming pollutants and toxic chemicals such as benzene. This is incredibly important because ground-level ozone levels are creeping up in Albuquerque as well as in the oil- and gas-producing regions of the San Juan and Permian basins in New Mexico.

Not to mention the fact that pound for pound, methane is a huge contributor to climate change and more than 80 times more potent in the short term than carbon dioxide.

Let's put some common sense into how energy companies do business on public and tribal lands in New Mexico. Let's show the nation we know how to partner and be responsible businesses. Collaboration will determine our quality of life.