

**Clean Air Task Force * Clean Water Action * Defenders of Wildlife * Earthjustice *
Environment America * Environmental Defense Fund * League of Conservation Voters *
National Audubon Society * National Wildlife Federation * Natural Resources Defense Council
* NextGen Climate America, Inc. * Ocean Conservancy * Physicians for Social Responsibility *
Sierra Club * Union of Concerned Scientists * The Wilderness Society**

September 18, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Your March 2014 Strategy to Reduce Methane Emissions announced that the Environmental Protection Agency will decide by this fall how best to reduce pollution from the oil and gas sector. The Strategy built on the commitment in your 2012 State of the Union Address that development of oil and gas resources must not put Americans' health and safety at risk.

The oil and natural gas industry is rapidly expanding without important public health and environmental protections, and urgent action is needed. One of the many critical measures needed to protect the health and safety of our citizens from the deleterious effects of oil and gas development is to reduce methane pollution from this industry.

We therefore respectfully call on you to swiftly issue national standards directly aimed at cutting emissions of harmful, climate-disrupting methane pollution from oil and gas operations. The EPA has clear authority under the Clean Air Act to develop smart and reasonable methane standards for the oil and gas industry that will help protect the health and welfare of all Americans. So, too, does the Department of the Interior, which is still relying on 30-year old policies that allow for uncontrolled waste of natural gas and methane emissions on our nation's treasured public lands.

The oil and natural gas sector is the largest industrial source of methane, which is a potent climate pollutant more than 80 times as powerful as carbon dioxide on a 20 year timeframe. Oil and gas sources also emit other dangerous pollutants that harm Americans' health, including smog-forming volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and cancer-causing pollutants like benzene.

Proven, low-cost technologies are already commercially available to cut methane emissions from the onshore oil and gas sector up to 50% in the next 5 years. This would have the same climate benefits over a 100-year timeframe as cutting about 140 million tons per year of carbon

dioxide. Because methane is very potent in the near-term, the impact on reduced warming over a 20-year timeframe after emissions reductions would be equivalent to cutting 340 million tons per year of carbon dioxide. The actual methane reductions may be twice as high, as there is increasing evidence that emissions from oil and gas operations are much higher than what's reported in official government inventories.

Reductions of this magnitude are achievable only by issuing methane pollution standards governing new and existing oil and gas sources. Relying on co-benefits that result from regulating VOCs would achieve only about one-tenth of these methane reductions. Methane standards would also contribute substantially to meeting your target of reducing the nation's heat-trapping gases by 17 percent by 2020, with even greater reductions post-2020. Finally, methane standards will deliver significant public health benefits, by simultaneously cutting smog-forming and toxic air pollutants that blanket communities downwind of oil and gas development across the country.

Many of the available technologies capture gas that would otherwise be wasted, resulting in cost savings for producers. Some companies recognize this benefit and have adopted methane pollution reduction measures. A recent report from EPA's Office of Inspector General, however, underscores that voluntary measures cannot be relied on to provide our nation's communities and families with adequate protection from this dangerous air pollution. And, while some states like Colorado have taken action to reduce methane emissions from the oil and natural gas sector, no national standards are in place to protect communities across the country.

We applaud the climate commitments you have made to date. We urge you and your administration to build on this legacy by announcing enforceable national methane emissions standards for new and existing oil and gas sources this fall. The oil and gas industry needs to be held to the same federal environmental standards as other major industries while we work as a nation to swiftly transition to a clean energy economy. This is essential to protect communities across the country and reduce the pollution that is disrupting our climate, and threatening public health, wildlife, and the natural resources upon which we all depend.

Thank you for your continued leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

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cc: John Podesta, Counselor to the President
The Honorable Gina McCarthy, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency
The Honorable Sally Jewell, Secretary, Department of Interior