



*Amid oil drilling, natural gas burns off in Watford City, North Dakota. (photo: Charles Rex Arbogast/AP)*

## Trump Will Suspend a Rule to Limit a Pollutant Far Worse Than Carbon

By Darryl Fears, The Washington Post, 08 December 17

**T**he Trump administration will suspend a rule to limit [methane leaks](#) from oil and gas operations on federal land, but its true aim may be to kill the Obama-era requirement.

A notice slated to be published Friday in the Federal Register by the Bureau of Land Management said the agency “has concerns regarding the statutory authority, cost, complexity, feasibility, and other implications” of the 2016 rule, which is set to go fully into effect next month.

Methane is a colorless and odorless gas that is up to 36 times as potent as carbon dioxide in terms of contributing to global warming. As development of oil and gas has increased through hydraulic drilling, or fracking, in shale formations, so have methane emissions.

The rule’s intent was to reduce wasted natural gas from “venting, flaring, and leaks during oil and natural gas production” through drilling on federally leased property and on Indian land. It began to take effect in January, with provisions phased in since then. The rule was to be fully enforced by next Jan. 17.

The delay, according to a BLM statement on Thursday, will avoid forcing oil and gas operations to comply with requirements “that may be rescinded or significantly revised in the near future.” The agency said it would review the rule over the next year.

But as the Trump administration has backed away from capping some methane leaks, an oil and gas industry advocacy group has [stepped in](#) with a program to reduce the leaks.

“The program overall is set up to continuously improve the environmental performance for onshore operators throughout the country through the process of learning, collaborating and taking action,” Erik Milito, director of upstream and industry operations for the American Petroleum Institute, said in a statement. “This is a very robust program.”

Oil giants, including Royal Dutch Shell, ExxonMobil, BP and Chevron, are participating and have agreed to stronger monitoring, which could result in more emission reductions.

Conservation groups on Thursday criticized the Trump administration’s retreat from stronger methane regulation. “It is inexcusable that the BLM is suspending this rule without putting a new rule in place, because it means that the federal government has decided to leave oversight of methane waste and pollution to the states for the indefinite future,” said Chase Huntley, a program director for energy and climate at the Wilderness Society.

Huntley was also suspicious of the industry’s attempt to regulate itself. “It’s somewhat amazing that the industry hasn’t already put forward its own standard,” he said.