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**COMMUNITY, HEALTH, BUSINESS GROUPS SAY WHITE HOUSE PLANS TO REDUCE OIL AND GAS POLLUTION FALL SHORT IN PROTECTING HEALTH**

The White House today announced new plans to reduce methane and toxic volatile organic compounds (VOC) emissions from oil and gas development sources. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas, and VOCs are a family of toxic chemicals that are linked to a number of health concerns including eye, nose and throat irritation, shortness of breath, headaches, nausea, damage to the liver, kidney, and central nervous system, and some are known carcinogens.

The proposed rules would only regulate methane emissions at new or modified oil and gas production sources and natural gas processing and transmission sources. Methane leaks from oil and gas infrastructure are pervasive and by not addressing existing sources, it is estimated that the EPA will be missing up to 90% of harmful emissions. The plan also relies, in part, on voluntary action from industry to meet the pollution reduction goals. Affected communities, health professionals and small business leaders say the Administration must do better.

Following are statements from organizations urging the Administration to step up its efforts to protect communities from harm, and hold oil and gas companies accountable for preventing pollution.

**Tom BK Goldtooth, Director of the Indigenous Environmental Network** said, “Our Tribes and Native communities all over the U.S. have seen firsthand the destruction of our environment and our health from oil and gas drilling, wells, pipelines and waste dumps. We are also on the frontlines of the disastrous effects of climate change. Cutting methane and toxic air emissions is a matter of survival, yet the Administration believes it would not be addressing existing contamination sources. Our Tribes are not mere stakeholders, but rights holders with the U.S. having fiduciary responsibilities to protect our lands and our people under treaty agreements and other obligations. We need more protections in place and we need them now.”

“The oil and gas industry has a long, destructive legacy for communities of color and low-income communities all over the U.S. who are overburdened with health problems from routine toxic air emissions as well as from chemical disasters. By leaving out existing oil and gas facilities from its methane and VOCs reduction plan, the Administration is allowing oil and gas companies to get away with polluting people and avoid accountability,” said **Michele Roberts, Co-Coordinator of the Environmental Justice and Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform**. “Cutting national and global levels of methane is critical, but not at the expense of addressing these toxic legacy issues at existing sites. The Administration needs to issue protective standards at every stop along the oil & gas industry's cycle of contamination, for existing and future sources, to set right the

injustices that workers and communities have faced for decades. Our communities deserve real solutions, and strong policies with enforceable action,” Roberts added.

“The 15 million Americans living in the oil and gas fields in the U.S., are, once again, falling through regulatory cracks. The Obama Administration’s plan for methane emissions won’t change anything about the toxic air we are breathing. It’s not just methane, but all the other chemicals we’re breathing – toluene, benzene, formaldehyde,” said **Rebecca Roter of Breathe Easy Susquehanna County** in Pennsylvania. “A recent collaborative study of air quality at oil and gas sites in 6 states, including near my home, showed extremely high levels of formaldehyde, sulfur dioxide and other chemicals that aren’t addressed in the White House plan. We need help now to protect our families health now, from all of the chemicals being emitted.”

“Having a strategy for reducing the climate impacts of methane is a critical step in the right direction, but making them voluntary for the gas and oil industry does not make sense. This is the same industry that is voluntarily impacting communities and making people sick all across the country. Voluntary measures are not a substitute for sensible standards,” said **Wes Gillingham, Director of Catskill Mountainkeeper** in New York State. “Every day we see more and more scientific documentation showing us just how serious the methane problem is, from methane plumes over gas fields to massive leaks from pipeline infrastructure. President Obama and the EPA have acknowledged the problem, but need to be more aggressive to deal with the pollution legacy that is threatening our planet.”

Health professional groups point out that the heavy toll that oil and gas emissions have on public health warrants more protective action. “Methane is a climate-forcing gas more than 70 times as powerful as carbon”, stated **Barbara Gottlieb, Environment & Health Director for Physicians for Social Responsibility**. “Every release of methane hastens us down the road of climate change—and as health professionals, we know what that means: more deaths from heat stroke, more dangerous flooding and storms, water contamination, insect-borne disease, asthma and more.”

“The proposed methane rules “grandfather” in existing facilities with known methane and VOC releases, meaning it exempts them from the proposed rule, said **Barbara Sattler, a registered nurse and Board member of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments**. “No real grandfather would allow toxic chemicals to continue to pollute his children and certainly no nurse would condone this exemption as a healthy choice.”

New York groups referenced the recent fracking prohibition decision by Governor Cuomo in their response to today’s White House announcement. **West Harlem Environmental Action (WEACT)** issued this statement: “We are pleased that the Administration is pushing efforts that will support low income, communities of color and Indigenous peoples who are literally living next door to these operations that emit large amounts of methane. But we can do more. By following New York’s footsteps, we can protect our high risk communities and reduce fossil fuel emissions. The State of New York Health Department banned high volume fracturing due to the significant uncertainties about the health outcomes New Yorkers might face with this unregulated process. They put the health of New Yorkers first, and President Obama needs to put the health of the nation first. Let’s spend less time expanding fossil fuel development and more time plugging up the existing holes in the infrastructure, minimizing dependency on fossil fuels, expanding opportunities for renewable energy, and insuring that enforcement happens at the local level reduce air toxins in our communities.”

“As the recent decision by New York shows, fracking poses serious health risks and should not go forward. Reducing methane is an important goal for mitigating catastrophic climate change. The EPA must act quickly to reduce methane emissions from all new *and existing* sources of oil and gas operations,” said **Ansje Miller, Eastern States Director for the Center for Environmental Health**. “However, the methane rules should not be exclusive of allaying the other health concerns from oil and gas development, and could distract us from the healthier renewable energy solutions we should pursuing.”

Polls of small business leaders on environmental issues show overwhelming, bipartisan support for standards that protect air and water quality. Sustainable business groups echoed those sentiments today. “President Obama’s action on regulating methane is an important step in reducing climate harming emissions associated with oil and gas development. It also makes sense economically, as the rules will reduce the amount of wasted and lost natural gas, estimated at \$1.5 billion,” said **Richard Eidlin, Vice President of Policy for the American Sustainable Business Council**, which represents more than 200,000 businesses across the country. “However, while we support this critical action to reduce the economic, health and environmental risks from climate change for American communities and businesses, we urge the President to quickly develop mandatory rules that apply to new and existing sources of methane.”

Raising concerns from rural farmers, **Dr. John Wesley Boyd, Jr., Founder & President, National Black Farmers Association**, said, “We commend the Obama Administration and the U.S. EPA for continuing to move in a forward direction to address climate change and reduce methane and other toxic air emissions in our communities. It is critical for our rural farmers to have clean air to grow healthy food. The National Black Farmers Association recognizes the importance of finding means to reduce carbon pollution as well as protecting our waters and soil from environmental contamination. These standards should also protect the health and welfare of all people, especially children, the elderly, as well as communities of color, from harmful pollution emitted from existing oil and gas activities as toxic chemicals from these sources may already be harming our farming communities.”

Many local and state organizations and governments are not waiting for the federal government to take stronger action to reduce pollution and health harm from oil and gas development. “Vermont became the first state in the nation to ban fracking precisely because lawmakers here were deeply concerned about the air pollution, water contamination and heat-trapping pollution that spews from this unconventional drilling practice,” said **Julia Michel, Energy and Democracy Advocate for the Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG)**. “While the White House’s proposal for federal regulation of methane releases from future sources is a welcome step, its shortcomings make state-level efforts to plug leaky infrastructure increasingly important.”

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For more information on the impacts of oil, gas and chemicals on public health and the environment, contact:

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