

October 16, 2014

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

Dear President Obama:

As organizations that care about public health as well as the fate of our planet's climate, we write to strongly support all meaningful efforts to curb air pollution from oil and gas development. While merely regulating methane will not make fracked gas a clean energy source, we support efforts to capture methane and other air pollution. It's necessary to protect communities living with oil and gas development and to help curb further global warming. Our continued reliance on fossil fuels, including oil and natural gas, is misguided and hampers the change that is truly needed -- an immediate shift to renewable energy.

We appreciate that your Administration is beginning to recognize that curbing methane pollution is essential to solving climate change. Methane, the principal component of natural gas, is 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide over a 20 year time period. In addition, smog-causing volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and hazardous air pollutants (HAPs) such as benzene and xylene, are released throughout the oil and gas development process from initial drilling, through transmission to end use, even if that end use is overseas.

The best way to curb air pollution from fossil fuel development is to leave it in the ground. We must transition as quickly as possible away from our dependence on fossil fuels and fully embrace a new, renewable energy economy. Continued reliance on fossil fuels, including natural gas, threatens the public health of communities living with fossil fuel development and contributes to global warming which threatens the Earth's future. Even with no methane leakage from production and transmission of natural gas, converting from coal to gas in the electricity sector still puts us on a path toward a much warmer planet. An immediate shift from an "all of the above" energy strategy to one that throws the full weight of our resources behind renewables is needed to address the climate crisis. Wind and solar energy are cost competitive with fossil fuels, and brings along with them more jobs, cleaner air and a healthier climate.

But until we end our reliance on fossil fuels, we urge your Administration to do anything and everything to protect human health and the environment from the destructive impacts of oil and gas development. Federal agencies must use the strongest regulatory tools and provisions of law available to protect the planet and the public. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has authority under the Clean Air Act to develop methane regulations for the oil and gas sector. In addition, the Department of the Interior (DOI) has the authority to control methane emissions and the waste of natural gas on our nation's public lands. Directly regulating methane will also help capture harmful VOCs

and HAPs emitted by the oil and gas industry, pollution that triggers asthma attacks and aggravates respiratory conditions like bronchitis.

To reiterate, reducing methane emissions from the oil and gas industry will not make drilling and fracking safe, or natural gas “clean.” Fossil fuel development is inherently risky and puts communities and our planet in jeopardy. Yet the oil and gas industry is exempt from many of our bedrock environmental laws, allowing them to pollute with impunity. Even when there are modestly protective laws on the books, they are rarely enforced. Regulators defer to industry needs over the well-being of surrounding communities.

The oil and gas industry must be held to the same standards as other major industries while we work as a nation to swiftly transition to a truly clean energy economy. Voluntary standards and other half measures are insufficient to cut harmful, climate-disrupting methane pollution from oil and gas operations and they will not adequately protect impacted communities. Voluntary standards also create a false sense of public security, when in fact public health is still at risk.

We must have strong methane regulations to control air pollution from oil and gas development, while simultaneously working to close the federal exemptions the industry enjoys. These stopgap measures will reduce climate pollution and protect communities in the short term, until this country makes the necessary transition away from dirty, dangerous fossil fuels.

Sincerely,

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