



February 1, 2017

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the tens of thousands of members of the undersigned medical and public health organizations, and the communities we serve, we strongly urge you to oppose any Congressional Review Act resolution of disapproval that would block air pollution limits that address the leakage of methane, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Methane and Waste Prevention Rule.

The Congressional Review Act is a blunt tool that would permanently block actions by BLM to reduce dangerous and wasteful methane leaks from the oil and gas industries. Use of the Congressional Review Act would not only block current actions to solve manageable problems; it would also prevent BLM from moving forward with substantially similar actions in the future.

Methane fugitive emissions (leaks) occur from oil and gas wells, drilling-related infrastructure and natural gas pipelines. Estimates of the amount of methane lost to leakage range from 9.3 percent to about 12 percent. Not only are these leaks wasteful, but they also create dangerous threats to health.

- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs), gases recognized as hazardous air pollutants, accompany the methane extracted from deep underground wells. VOCs include benzene, a known human carcinogen; ethylbenzene, a probable carcinogen; and toluene, a neurotoxin (affecting the nervous system) that may also cause miscarriages and birth defects. Comprehensive methane limits would immediately reduce emissions of these life-threatening substances.

- VOCs are also precursors to the formation of ground-level ozone, a dangerous air pollutant that causes permanent lung damage. By limiting emissions of VOCs, oil and natural gas limits will reduce the risk of ozone formation in the air and, thus, the risk of ozone-related health effects, including asthma attacks, hospital admissions and premature deaths.

Finally, methane itself is a highly potent driver of climate change, one of the greatest threats to public health in our time. Methane is an extremely powerful heat-trapping gas; over its first 20 years in the atmosphere, it is 84 times more effective at retaining heat than is carbon dioxide.¹ The resulting higher temperatures mean longer and hotter heat waves and more ground-level ozone; these in turn contribute to asthma attacks, cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and premature death. Climate change also increases the frequency and intensity of storms, droughts, wildfires and flooding; these are associated with accidental deaths, crop losses, air pollution, water contamination, and the spread of disease-causing pathogens. If we as health and medical organizations are to protect the public's health, it is vital that our nation make progress in the fight against climate change.

The Congressional Review Act, if applied to BLM's Methane and Waste Prevention Rule, would block feasible, affordable steps to reduce methane leakage. It would deprive Americans of vital protections from carcinogenic and neurotoxic substances and from climate change. Please make the health of your constituents your priority and reject the use of Congressional Review Act resolutions on actions that would protect our health and our current and future wellbeing.

Sincerely,

Allergy & Asthma Network
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Lung Association
American Public Health Association
American Thoracic Society
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Center for Climate Change & Health
Health Care Without Harm
National Association of County & City Health Officials
National Environmental Health Association
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Public Health Institute
Trust for America's Health

¹ IPCC (2013). Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge University Press. https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg1/WG1AR5_Chapter08_FINAL.pdf