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Texas Railroad Commission Adopts Lackluster Proposal for Public Comment to Improve Flaring and Venting Permit Requests

Austin, TX- Today the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC) released a modest proposal to revise the "[Rule 32 Datasheet](#)" to require oil and gas operators to provide more accurate information to the Commission when requesting authorization to flare and vent gas (methane).

The public will now have 30 days to comment on the proposal before the Commission takes final action, most likely in September. Under the proposal, operators will have to better identify the exact locations and volumes of proposed flaring and venting, and in some cases, document how they plan to reduce the amount of flaring and venting. The proposal does not however actually require (and therefore does not guarantee) a reduction in flaring and venting. Ironically, while the Commission discussed the proposed data sheet revision, under Rule 32 they authorized another 30 "exceptions," allowing even more companies to flare and vent gas.

"The Railroad Commission yet again missed an opportunity to crack down on toxic methane emissions by limiting this initial proposal to improving data and recordkeeping," **said Cyrus Reed, Conservation Director at the Lone Star Chapter at the Sierra Club.** "Better data and documentation is a good thing, but the Commission should listen to companies, the public and legislators calling on a much bolder approach to actually reduce pollution that is impacting communities right here in Texas. It's time to scrap current policy and rework Rule 32 itself."

The modest proposal was met by disappointment from conservation organizations, landowners, and many members of the legislature, who sent a letter on Monday to the Commission asking for much bolder action. The letter, signed by 15 Texas Senators and House members, called on the Commission to set a goal to end routine flaring by 2025, a demand that the Sierra Club, Environment Texas and the Environmental Defense Fund have all endorsed.

[In the letter](#), the Senators and Representatives wrote: "Developing a plan to end routine flaring in Texas is consistent with the statutory directive for the Commission to 'do all things necessary for the conservation of oil and gas and prevention of waste of oil and gas.' Such an achievement would also better protect our health and environment, steer the industry toward more responsible management of our resources, and remind the world once again of Texas' energy leadership."

This spring, the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) launched the [Permian Map](#), which depicts aerial observations of methane emissions in the Permian Basin, located in west Texas and

southeast New Mexico. An initial release of the data found that 11 % of flares in the study area were malfunctioning, and 5 percent of the flares were completely unlit, or “venting.”

Venting unburned methane, volatile organic compounds, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons can be much worse for human health and the environment. These pollutants warm the climate, contribute to ground-level ozone formation, are carcinogenic, and aggravate respiratory conditions such as asthma. Addressing these emission sources is even more urgent now, because some of the deadliest symptoms of Covid-19 include respiratory complications.