SIERRA CLUB
LONE STAR CHAPTER

Protect Our Health, Water & Air Quality

Support common sense measures on methane pollution, oil and gas spills

Overview

- Methane and other air pollutants associated with the oil and gas industry can harm our health. These toxins can cause cancer, respiratory symptoms, anemia, brain damage and birth defects, eye irritation, and blood and neurological disorders.
- Recent floods and hurricane have shown how vulnerable oil and gas facilities are to failure during storms, leading to leaks, spills and air emissions which were highlighted during Hurricane Harvey.
- Methane and other air pollutants can also lead to high levels of ozone formation, or smog, create haze and high levels of sulfur, and contribute to the warming of our climate.
- Texas was in six of the fifteen highest methane-emitting oil and gas-producing basins in the country in 2014, including three of the highest five. The Anadarko Basin was the highest followed by the Gulf Coast Basin.
- A recent series of studies by the Environmental Defense Fund using on-the-ground and satellite data concluded that methane emissions were much higher (60% higher) than the EPA estimated.
- Another EDF study used satellite data to show that Permian Basin operators flared off 104 billion cubic feet of natural gas in 2017 — about 4.4 percent of all gas produced in the region — while state records showed they reported burning just 55 billion cubic feet of gas, wasting product and creating pollution.

Funding

- Support 22 additional inspectors as requested by the Railroad Commission of Texas through the budget process.
- Support $1.5 million in TCEQ budget request for mobile monitoring equipment to monitor air emissions from refineries, chemical plants and oil and gas facilities

Bills on OIl and Gas Enforcement and Air Pollution

- **HB 860** (Anchia): Creates parity among state agencies by raising maximum RRC fines from $10,000 per day to $25,000.
- **HB 225** (Reynolds) & **SB 1380** (Rodriguez): Requires that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality study the potential for improved regulation of methane and other pollution from oil and gas facilities.

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- **HB 3275** (Gonzalez, Jessica): Repeals the exemption from severance tax for flared gas.
- **SB 2064** (Menendez): Requires any oil and gas lease going through the UT System to reduce methane pollution.

Bills on Oil and Gas Water Pollution

- **HB 1147** (Lucio III): Requires oil and gas wells along the coast to have subsurface safety valves to prevent spills during flooding.
- **SB 1446** (Johnson, Nathan): Requires TCEQ to develop performance standards for above-ground oil and gas storage tanks to prevent spills and emissions in flooding or hurricanes.

Background on Air Pollution

Methane is an invisible, odorless, organic compound. It is the main component of natural gas, and is emitted from both natural processes and human activity. Human activities like industrial processes, agriculture, and waste decomposition account for over 60 percent of total emissions.

The oil and gas industry is the largest industrial source of methane pollution in the U.S. and Texas is the largest producer of oil and gas, accounting for over 30 percent of U.S. domestic production. Consequently, this means that a significant portion of methane pollution is coming from Texas oil and gas development. Rather than wasting this resource, the TCEQ and RRC should develop common sense standards for reducing methane pollution, which would protect our health and heat our homes.

Texans who live near oil and gas facilities have direct experience with the frequent flaring and fugitive emissions that occur. Now is the time to increase inspections and enforcement efforts and implement safeguards to protect our communities and environment from methane and other pollutants.

Background on Water Pollution

Hurricane Harvey and previous events, like the Trinity River floods of 2015, revealed that older oil and gas storage tanks are subject to failure. Multiple large oil and gas tanks failed, causing large spills and emissions events, particularly in near Houston. Storms also destroyed oil and gas wellhead equipment at coastal oil and gas wells, leading to multiple spills. Both situations are preventable. First, the Railroad Commission should require coastal oil and gas wells, and those near major rivers, install subsurface safety valves that shut-off during storms or floods. Second, the TCEQ should implement performance standards like geodesic domed-roofs and internal floating tanks to prevent storage tank roof failure to protect the public.