

OPENING STATEMENT
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of the Subcommittee on Environment

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Environment
“A Solution in Search of a Problem: EPA’s Methane Regulations”
September 15, 2016

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I would particularly like to thank Mr. Elgie Holstein of the Environmental Defense Fund, who has done a considerable amount of work on methane releases, and the environmental impacts of methane.

Despite the title for this hearing, methane leaks and releases are a real problem for many Americans all over this country on a daily basis. Unlike the billowing smoke that rises from some coal fired power plants, methane releases and leaks are nearly imperceptible to a passerby. It is therefore easy to forget how potent a greenhouse gas methane actually is. Once methane is released into the atmosphere it is 80 percent more potent than carbon dioxide over the next 20 years in terms of its impact on the climate.

Oftentimes environmental impacts stemming from atmospheric pollution are easy to see. Higher ozone levels reduce visibility in the form of smog, in addition to creating greater health risks. Higher concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are ultimately absorbed by the ocean, resulting in a more acidic ocean that has a visible impact on shellfish, and other economic problems. Methane emissions have similar environmental impacts but due to its chemistry it is often difficult to visualize.

I’d like to put up a slide that will give some of you a better understanding of what a methane leak looks like <call for slide>. Last fall, a natural gas storage tank at Aliso Canyon outside of Los Angeles began leaking methane at an alarming rate. The leak was discovered by the gas company on October 23rd and it took four months for that leak to be completely fixed. In that time, those plumes continued to rise, and thousands of gallons of methane poured into the atmosphere.

Incidents like this highlight the importance of EPA’s methane regulations. While the new rule only addresses methane emissions at new, reconstructed, and modified oil and gas sources, it is an important first step to ensure that the problems of today are not the problems of tomorrow. I look forward to discussing this important issue today, and I yield back.