

Methane Emissions from Oil and Gas Development: U.S. Government Accountability Office Report



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The United States Government Accountability Office (“GAO”) issued an April 20, 2022, report titled: *OIL AND GAS: Federal Actions Needed to Address Methane Emissions from Oil and Gas Development (“Report”)*

The *Report* was undertaken pursuant to the request of:

Joe Manchin, III

Chairman, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate

Thomas R. Carper

Chairman, Committee on Environment and Public Works, United States Senate

Senator Maria Cantwell

Senator Angus S. King, Jr.

Oil and gas production activities can emit methane through:

- Intentional releases
- Leaks

Methane is considered a significant greenhouse gas.

GAO was asked to review methane emissions from oil and gas development on federal lands. In response, the Report:

1. Describes the steps federal agencies have taken to reduce methane emissions from oil and gas, and implementation challenges
2. Examines actions selected industry entities are taking to reduce methane emissions
3. Examines how selected states regulate methane emissions and to what extent those efforts could serve as guideposts for additional federal actions

GAO notes that both the United States Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) and Department of Interior’s Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) have promulgated regulations to reduce oil and gas production methane emissions. Nevertheless, the Report expresses concerns that these regulatory activities have encountered issues. The Report states:

. . . for example, in 2016, EPA established national standards for methane emissions, but EPA repealed and curtailed those requirements in 2020. A June 2021 Congressional Resolution resulted in the reinstatement of the 2016 methane standards. EPA and BLM are in the process of developing proposed rulemakings to reduce methane emissions.

Some industry participants are identified as undertaking voluntary actions to address methane emissions such as the use of aircraft and satellites to detect emissions. Further, certain states are stated to have promulgated regulations addressing methane emissions from oil and gas development that exceed BLM's requirements.

The GAO Report's recommendations include:

1. EPA should provide greater flexibility for operators to use alternative technologies to detect methane emissions
2. BLM should consider whether to require gas capture plans similar to what states require (including gas capture targets on federal lands)

A copy of the GAO Report can be downloaded [here](#).