



Dear Oil Conservation Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on the proposed rules to regulate the venting and flaring of natural gas from oil and natural gas production and gathering facilities, Case #21528. I provided a summary of these comments verbally during public comment before the Commission on January 4, 2021.

My name is Liliana Castillo. I am the deputy director of CAVU. For the past 15 years, we have shared stories to bring people together to create local solutions to the climate crisis.

As we have traveled across the state hearing from community members, experts, and decision-makers about climate impacts, their stories reveal that we are failing to protect people who live alongside the oil and gas industry, confirmed by data over and over again.

Their stories deserve not only our attention but also our action.

We applaud Gov. Lujan Grisham's administration for recognizing how important and urgent it is to address New Mexico's massive and growing methane emissions problem and continuing to prioritize the rules. These issues have only become more pressing as the federal government removes safeguards for the environment and health and the COVID-19 virus continues to impact our neighbors.

While the Oil Conservation Division rule has a strong structure, it should be strengthened to meet the Governor's goal of nation-leading methane rules and deliver meaningful action for communities impacted directly by oil and gas pollution and climate changes.

The final rule must achieve three key goals:

1. Ban routine venting and flaring and only allow such activities when necessary for health and safety, and require flaring over venting except when necessary for health and safety.
2. Require oil and gas companies to capture 98% of methane emissions by 2026.
3. Strengthen state reporting and public notice requirements to improve transparency and ensure accountability of oil and gas operations.

The Oil Conservation Commission should improve the proposal before it by:

- Denying permits to drill new wells if operators are out of compliance with gas capture requirements. Operators should be required to invest first in complying

with their legal requirements to prevent methane waste and pollution before they drill new wells.

- Requiring “green completions” to minimize methane emissions during completions and recompletions.
- Toughening provisions to ensure that flares stay lit and work properly at all times, preventing methane from being vented into the atmosphere.
- Requiring operators to immediately notify persons and communities at risk when methane releases threaten public health, safety, or the environment occur.
- Prohibiting routine venting and flaring during pipeline maintenance and repairs and only allow for flaring if necessary for safety.
- Ensuring that any leaks or repairs through the ALARM program are verified by an independent third party to ensure the integrity of the program. While voluntary ALARM holds promise in incentivizing technological innovations, such programs are not a substitute for mandatory leak detection and repair requirements, the most important tool for reducing methane leaks.

Finally, comprehensive rules to address methane waste and pollution must include a strict NM Environment Department rule since nearly 70% of oil and gas methane pollution in New Mexico occurs through leaks. NMED’s draft rule fails to protect public health and our climate by exempting 95% of wells from regulation across the state from oversight and necessary leak detection and repair requirements. The Commission should clarify that the agencies must work in parallel to achieve comprehensive rules that cut methane and air pollution.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment and all your work and time on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liliana Castillo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

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