Re: Reconsideration and Stay of EPA’s Methane New Source Performance Standards for the Oil and Natural Gas Sector

Administrator E. Scott Pruitt
Office of the Administrator, Code 1101A
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

We write to convey our opposition to your April 18 decision to reconsider important provisions of the currently effective performance standards for new and modified sources in the oil and natural gas sector, which will reduce harmful methane, smog-forming pollution, and toxic emissions from these sources. We also oppose your stated intent to stay those provisions.

In a letter you sent to several oil and gas industry associations on April 18, you indicated that you intend to reconsider and stay requirements to find and fix equipment leaks, promising that “sources will not need to comply with these requirements while the stay is in effect.” The current compliance date for these requirements is June 3, 2017. This stay will increase health risks for numerous Americans living in close proximity to wells and other facilities, which will emit significant amounts of additional hazardous and smog-forming pollution that would otherwise have been reduced. The stay will also add thousands of tons of methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas, to an atmosphere already overburdened with heat-trapping pollutants. Further, the stay will cause the waste of substantial volumes of valuable natural gas.

The leak detection and repair provisions that your letter threatens to stay are the cornerstone of EPA’s methane standards. They require oil and gas operators to use proven, common-sense solutions to monitor their infrastructure and equipment in order to identify and then repair components that are leaking natural gas (the predominant component of which is methane) into the air. The agency projects that the leak detection and repair requirements alone will deliver over half of the rule’s methane reductions and nearly 90 percent of its toxic air pollution reductions, including known human carcinogens like benzene. These protections also will result in substantial reductions of volatile organic compounds, which form ground-level ozone, the primary component of smog.

Suspending these requirements would allow thousands of newly-drilled or modified wells and compressor stations across the country to continue leaking large volumes of this harmful air pollution, posing serious health risks to communities, families, and workers. Such an action would leave the people living and working in these
communities unprotected while delaying modest compliance expenditures by the oil and gas companies that own and operate new and modified wells—expenditures that represent a tiny fraction of these companies' tens of billions of dollars in annual revenues.

These measures are highly cost-effective, even without accounting for the climate and health benefits of preventing leaks. In public testimony on EPA’s proposed rule, a leak detection and repair company indicated that it provides surveys for $250 per well, and other sources have documented similarly modest costs. Moreover, compliance with the leak detection and repair provisions will prioritize taxpayers’ interests by ensuring resources that would otherwise be leaked to the atmosphere are instead captured and put to use. And greater adoption of methane mitigation practices will help to put Americans to work in the methane mitigation industry, which represents over 130 U.S. companies with locations in almost every state, helping to recover otherwise wasted natural gas. The stay will harm companies that provide methane mitigation technologies and services – 60% of which are small businesses.

EPA’s methane standards are national protections that will ensure all communities benefit from these common sense best practices—and not just those located in states that have adopted such regulations. These proven state-level standards—including requirements in Colorado, Ohio, and Wyoming—demonstrate that protective pollution measures are entirely consistent with continued development and economic growth. The purpose of national standards under section 111 of the Clean Air Act is to ensure that all Americans are protected from sources of harmful pollution. The stay, however, will leave millions of Americans at risk.

A broad and diverse set of stakeholders supports the current oil and gas standards, including lawmakers in major producing states, small businesses, manufacturing workers’ groups, investors, health professionals, public health groups, labor unions, and environmental organizations. Polling during the rule’s comment period showed that 67 percent of Americans supported the proposed safeguards.

We strongly urge you to adhere to the rule’s deadlines and not attempt to stay the leak detection and repair provisions.

You can reach me at pzalzal@edf.org or 303-447-7214 to further discuss this request.

Respectfully submitted,

Bakeyah Nelson
Air Alliance Houston

Laura Belleville
Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Georgia Murray
Appalachian Mountain Club

Jessica Eckdish
BlueGreen Alliance
Rebecca Roter  
Breathe Easy Susquehanna County

Deborah Burney-Sigman, Ph.D.  
Breathe Utah

Jill Wiener  
Catskill Citizens for Safe Energy

William Snape  
Center for Biological Diversity

Veronica Coptis  
Center for Coalfield Justice

Sue Chiang  
Center for Environmental Health

Joseph Otis Minott, Esq.  
Clean Air Council

Conrad Schneider  
Clean Air Task Force

John Noël  
Clean Water Action

Joseph K. Lyou, Ph.D.  
Coalition for Clean Air

Benton Howell  
Common Ground Rising

Pete Maysmith  
Conservation Colorado

Sean Mahoney  
Conservation Law Foundation

Demis Foster  
Conservation Voters New Mexico Education Fund

Timothy Ballo  
Earthjustice

Lauren Pagel  
Earthworks

Taylor Thomas  
East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice

Peter Zalzal  
Environmental Defense Fund

Adam Kron  
Environmental Integrity Project

Howard A. Learner  
Environmental Law & Policy Center

Diane Dreier  
Gas Drilling Awareness Coalition of Luzerne County, Inc.

Amber Reimondo  
Grand Canyon Trust

Todd Larsen  
Green America

Tanja Srebotnjak  
Harvey Mudd College

Susan Stephenson  
Interfaith Power & Light

Madeleine Foote  
League of Conservation Voters

Ranjana Bhandari  
Liveable Arlington

Maureen Drouin  
Maine Conservation Voters

Rebecca Boulos  
Maine Public Health Association

Molly Rauch  
Moms Clean Air Force
H. Drew Galloway
MOVE San Antonio

Shannon Heyck-Williams
National Wildlife Federation

David Doniger
Natural Resources Defense Council

Melinda Hughes
Nature Abounds

Joan Brown, OSF
New Mexico Interfaith Power & Light

Deborah Hanson
Northern Plains Resource Council

Melanie Houston
Ohio Environmental Council

Robert Altenburg
PennFuture

Barbara Gottlieb
Physicians for Social Responsibility

Karen D’Andrea
Physicians for Social Responsibility, Maine

Ned Ketyer, MD, FAAP
Walter Tsou, MD, MPD
Physicians for Social Responsibility, Philadelphia

Stephanie Thomas
Public Citizen

Barbara Jarmoska
Responsible Drilling Alliance

Michael Kellett
RESTORE: The North Woods
Tricia Cortez
Rio Grande International Study Center

Diane Duesterhoeft
San Antonio Interfaith Power & Light

Mark Pearson
San Juan Citizens Alliance

Andres Restrepo
Sierra Club

Glen Brand
Sierra Club, Maine

Dr. Cyrus Reed
Sierra Club, Lone Star Chapter

Raina Rippel
Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project

Robin Schneider
Texas Campaign for the Environment

Yaira Robinson
Texas Physicians for Social Responsibility

Chase Huntley
The Wilderness Society

Dan York
The Wildlands Conservancy

Harriett Jane Olson
United Methodist Women

Roy Houseman
United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union (USW)

James C. Harrison
Utility Workers Union of America, ALF-CIO

Steve Allerton
Western Colorado Congress