

Comments of Liz Mueller
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On
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Listening Session on the
Upcoming Oil and Natural Gas Methane Rule
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Good evening, my name is Liz Mueller – spell name – and I am the National Director of Advocacy for Healthy Air at the American Lung Association. Thank you for giving me and so many others the chance to speak at this week's listening sessions on methane.

As the nation's oldest voluntary health organization, the American Lung Association operates under the motto – “when you can't breathe, nothing else matters.” Coming out of the worst pandemic this world has seen in over 100 years, all caused by a respiratory disease, those words ring truer than ever. Millions of Americans are living with a preexisting lung condition – whether it's asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (or COPD), or those facing new challenges with lingering COVID-19 impacts. For those individuals, simply breathing can be a hard task and it is made worse by climate change which is in part fueled by oil and gas operations.

The extraction, processing, transport and distribution of gas, or methane, can release emissions into the atmosphere at every step of the way. While we're here today to talk about methane, I wanted to make sure to point out that it's not just methane emissions that are released in oil and gas operations. Volatile organic compounds, like benzene, are emitted alongside methane and can worsen asthma symptoms, threaten lung development in children and increase the risk of cancer, developmental and neurological disorders. A stronger methane rule and accountability placed on oil and gas operators can also help reduce the levels of these dangerous compounds.

Methane is a powerful accelerator of climate change – it is 86 times more potent than carbon over its first 20 years in the atmosphere. The health impacts from climate change are not far off occurrences that we can shove under the rug until we want to deal with them. They are happening now and we must mitigate the impacts by dramatically reducing the amount of methane we're putting into the atmosphere and hopefully staving off worse impacts in the future.

As we speak, the west and southeastern United States are experiencing record-high temperatures, droughts and the increasing threat of a wildfire season even more active and deadly than the last. For the eastern United States, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is predicting another above-normal Atlantic hurricane season. These extreme weather patterns are being fueled by climate change which is being fueled by methane emissions. Every time a wildfire or a hurricane strikes, it threatens the health and well-being of communities long after the last flames are put out or the floods subside.

Since methane is such a strong contributor to climate change, everyone is impacted by it but there are some communities who are disproportionately affected by the impacts stemming from methane pollution. One in three people in the United States live in a county with oil and gas production and is more at risk from the co-pollutants released along with methane. And climate change, fueled by

methane emissions, is making air pollution worse, making it even harder for some vulnerable communities to breathe. The American Lung Association's State of the Air Report found that 40% of Americans live in areas with unhealthy levels of air pollution – and people of color are three times more likely than whites to live in the most polluted of those areas. We appreciate this Administration's commitment to prioritizing environmental justice and we urge you to remember and act on that commitment when it comes to action on oil and gas operations.

The American Lung Association supports EPA issuing strong regulations to reduce methane emissions from new and existing oil and gas sources by 65% of the 2012 levels by 2025. We have the technology to make it happen and the science to say it has to happen. We look forward to living in a world where everyone can breathe easier.

Thank you for your time.