

April 23, 2018

To the Honorable Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke:

As religious organizations we are deeply concerned by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) recent proposal to repeal major provisions of the 2016 Methane Waste Prevention Rule.

The BLM methane rule was finalized in 2016 after an extended three-year process that included public hearings, listening sessions and a comment period. In 2017, a bipartisan majority in the U.S. Senate upheld the need to address methane pollution and rejected a Congressional Review Act resolution to repeal the Methane Waste Prevention Rule. This public input and actions by policymakers reveals strong support for curbing methane pollution and waste. Throughout the crafting of the rule and deliberations on whether to revise or rescind it, religious communities have made our position known. **It is our moral responsibility to do all we can, as soon as we can, to prevent methane waste, protect the health of most vulnerable, and safeguard God's creation.**

We are concerned that the fast pace of this rollback does not allow for communities that will bear the greatest impacts to offer feedback. There is not even a single hearing in any western state, where people who would be most impacted by this rule reside.

Our communities understand that stakes are high for our health, taxpayer resources, and climate, so take the fate of this rule seriously. Our religious communities seek a healthy and abundant future for the families and children we serve. Leaking oil and gas operations contribute to asthma, cancer, and other health problems in nearby communities. Illnesses contribute to missed work and school days. To compound matters, the methane that is leaked annually could heat an estimated one million homes, and we lose millions in tax revenue that could go toward schools, libraries, and other much-needed community services.

We are not only committed to protecting vulnerable populations but also caring for God's created world. Methane is a highly potent heat-trapping pollutant that warms the climate 86 times more than carbon dioxide during the first twenty years after its release. The most significant source of methane emissions are oil and gas operations, which also emit other dangerous pollutants that harm our communities' health, including smog-forming volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and cancer-causing pollutants like benzene.

We look to BLM to deliver strong methane pollution standards in order to cut emissions of toxic air pollutants and protect human health.

We have a moral obligation to protect God's gift of air for current and future generations. Rolling back this common sense rule without holding a single hearing in the western communities impacted by this rule disregards key voices. Dismantling this rule, which reduces waste, protects human health, and aids in environmental stewardship, fails to uphold the common good.

Sincerely,

Creation Justice Ministries
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Green Chalice Ministry
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Maryknoll Sisters, Eastern US Region
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Justice Team
Union for Reform Judaism
Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society