

IADC Briefing Book

Venting & Flaring



Flaring is the controlled burning of natural gas and is a common practice in oil and gas exploration, production and processing. Venting is the controlled release of gases into the atmosphere during oil and gas production operations. [1] The U.S. Government Accountability Office recently found that 40% of methane gas being burned or vented could be captured economically and sold. [2] According to the U.S. Department of Interior, between 2009 and 2014, the amount of natural gas lost through venting, flaring and leaks could power more than 5 million homes for a year. [3] In response, in January 2016, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposed a rule that would require oil and gas producers to limit the rate of flaring at oil wells on public and tribal lands, and would prevent them from venting natural gas except in the case of emergencies and from specified equipment subject to proposed limits. [4]

Key Messages

- Natural gas is valuable. Companies would always prefer to capture it rather than flare it off. However, there are several reasons why it is necessary to flare gas during the drilling, production or processing phases. These include during well production testing after drilling is completed, for safety during emergencies and maintenance and for managing gas during compression and processing. [5]
- Venting and flaring are associated with methane emissions. Since 2005, according to the Western Energy Alliance, methane emissions from natural gas venting/flaring have declined 38% even as production has boomed. [6]
- Energy groups have argued that the BLM rule in particular is duplicative, particularly as methane emission levels are falling. The rule could drive more energy production off federal lands and have the unintended affects of fewer jobs, higher costs for consumers, less energy security and less federal revenue.

Resources

1. International Association of Oil & Gas Producers: <http://www.ogp.org.uk/pubs/288.pdf>
2. U.S. Government Accountability Office: <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-34>
3. U.S. Bureau of Labor Management:
http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/wo/Communications_Directorate/public_affairs/news_release_attachments.Par.74451.File.dat/VF_Fact_Sheet.pdf
4. Bureau of Land Management venting rules
5. US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):
<http://www.epa.state.oh.us/Portals/27/oil%20and%20gas/Basics%20of%20Gas%20Flaring.pdf>
6. Western Energy Alliance: <https://www.westernenergyalliance.org/knowledge-center/air/methane>

