

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Another Voice: New York takes the lead on methane pollution as Washington retreats

By **Another Voice**

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By **Robert M. Ciesielski**

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo announced in his State of the State message a methane gas study to inventory emissions and identify methods to capture or eliminate release of the gas. This is especially needed concerning leakage by the fracked gas and pipeline industry.

Fracked methane gas is not “clean,” despite the claims of the oil and gas industry. A molecule of methane is at least 100-times more potent in retaining heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide in the first 10 years of its release. The practice of high-volume horizontal shale gas drilling appears to leak up to 12 percent of extracted methane from venting, storage and pipeline distribution.

A research article titled “The recent increase in atmospheric methane” by A.J. Turner of Harvard University, et al, was published in February. The study documents a staggering 30 percent increase in global methane emissions in the last decade, most of it coming from the United States. These releases have been demonstrated by ground-based and satellite imagery.

The increase in our nation’s emissions is largely due to the high-volume shale gas drilling in the United States. This dangerous release of methane greenhouse gas into the atmosphere is apparent to the scientific community, but ignored by members of the oil and gas industry and their political supporters.

Unfortunately, the new presidential administration is intent on disregarding and denying the destructive effects of high-volume fracking and methane emissions. In one of his first acts as the new head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt canceled a regulation requiring methane leakage be measured by the fracking industry, saying it was too costly to business.

At the same time, the EPA’s website has had scientific information on methane, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change altered or removed. The agency’s mission statement has been changed to remove the phrase “science-based.”

The proposed federal budget halts funding for four government space programs that provide accurate global measurements of atmospheric and ocean warming changes.

Forcing our collective heads into the sand concerning climate change is morally wrong and a real threat to our nation and life on Earth.

It is extremely important that methane releases from gas and oil fracking be properly measured in all plans and agreements to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Cuomo is to be commended for his foresight in establishing the New York methane study. In the meantime, our state's continuing efforts to develop a sustainable, clean energy economy is a beacon to others.

Robert M. Ciesielski of Buffalo is a volunteer with the state Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club and serves as Energy Committee chairman.