Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
Bringing Science and Passion to the Environmental Health Movement

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Member Forum on BLM Methane Rule

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the public health implications of the BLM Methane and Waste Prevention Rule. My name is Katie Huffling. I am the Executive Director of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments. I am also a registered nurse and a certified nurse midwife. The Alliance is a national coalition of nursing organizations and individual nurses who believe that the environment and human health are inextricably connected. Our mission is to promote healthy people and healthy environments by educating and leading the nursing profession, advancing research, and incorporating evidence-based practice.

The Alliance, along with a number of health organizations such as the American Lung Association and Physicians for Social Responsibility, strongly support the BLM rule to limit methane and VOC emissions. This rule not only helps to mitigate climate change and its associated health risks by limiting emissions of methane – an especially potent greenhouse gas, but it also limits emissions of toxic and carcinogenic air pollutants, benefiting public health in communities across the country.

Climate change is one of the most serious public health threats we face today. To limit climate impacts and protect the health of our children, our communities and the public, the United States must significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Methane is an extremely powerful heat-trapping gas. Over its first 20

years in the atmosphere, it is 84 times more effective at retaining heat than carbon dioxide. This results in higher temperatures and longer and hotter heat waves, as well as more ground-level ozone. These in turn contribute to asthma attacks, cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and even premature death. Those at greatest risk are those with preexisting pulmonary disease, children due to their more rapid breathing rate and developing lungs and immune systems, and pregnant women because of an increased risk of preterm labor and delivery of low birth weight infants.

Decreasing methane emissions is an essential step to reduce the burden of climate change, but the benefits go far outside the impact on the climate. There are immediate lifesaving benefits to public health.

With the BLM methane rule we immediately see reductions in the emissions of volatile organic compounds or VOC's. The VOC benzene and formaldehyde, another hazardous pollutant from oil and gas emissions, are recognized as known human carcinogens, while ethylbenzene is considered a probable carcinogen.

VOCs are also precursors to the formation of ozone. VOCs react with nitrogen oxides in the presence of sunlight to form ground level ozone. By limiting emissions of VOCs, we will see reductions in the amount of ozone formed in the air. This will reduce the incidence of ozone-related health effects, including asthma attacks, hospital admissions and premature deaths. For children with asthma living near oil and gas development sites this will result in fewer asthma attacks and fewer days missed from school and fewer days their parents miss work. This translates into more economic stability, especially for low-income families, and gives the child a better chance to be successful in school and life.

Some VOCs are also precursors to the formation of fine particulate matter, $PM_{2.5}$. $PM_{2.5}$ causes respiratory and cardiovascular harm, lung cancer and premature death. Reducing emissions of VOCs will reduce the $PM_{2.5}$ in the atmosphere, and thus decrease the risks of these health impacts.

The people most at risk of harm from methane and VOC emissions include: infants, children and teenagers; older adults; pregnant women; people with asthma and other lung diseases; people with cardiovascular disease; diabetics; and people with low incomes. More than 12 million people in the US

live in communities near oil and gas facilities and these are often located near lower income or minority communities. By decreasing emissions, we will be protecting the health of those most vulnerable in our society.

In closing I urge you to support the BLM methane rule and reject efforts to block this health protective policy. It is a step in the right direction to address climate change and improve the health of all Americans.

Katie Huffling, MS, RN, CNM

Executive Director

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments