

Local government coalitions rebuke legal challenge to clean air, climate protections

Now is not the time to erase new rules that cut oil and gas pollution and protect public health and our climate

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Colorado Communities for Climate Action (CC4CA) and the Western Leaders Network released the below statements criticizing a recently filed lawsuit seeking to overturn new air quality standards that reduces harmful methane and ozone pollution from the oil and gas industry, threatening public health and our climate.

“We are deeply disappointed to see a lawsuit seeking to allow more climate and air pollution from the oil and gas industry. Colorado’s Air Quality Control Commission recently voted unanimously to adopt strong standards that not only address our climate crisis, but protect the air we breathe,” **said Gwen Lachelt, executive director of Western Leaders Network.** “As Colorado is faced with increased methane and ozone pollution, these new commonsense rules are needed now more than ever. Given the current affairs of our public health crisis, we should protect these rules to fight a warming climate that worsens ozone pollution and makes vector borne diseases more prevalent.”

Colorado now has some straight forward rules that help keep our air clean and help protect our communities from the impacts of climate disruption,” noted Jamie Harkins, Mayor of Lafayette and President of Colorado Communities for Climate Change. “These rules are widely supported by local governments across the state.”

In 2019, the Colorado legislature passed, and Gov. Jared Polis signed into law, a number of laws such as Senate Bill 19-181 that set a mandate for the AQCC to strengthen controls that cut methane (a powerful greenhouse gas), ozone-forming pollutants, and hazardous air pollutants from oil and gas operations. House Bill 19-1261 also requires the AQCC to adopt regulations to reduce climate pollution to meet rigorous, science based targets. In the face of these and other laws and public policy considerations, these lawsuits would take the state in absolute wrong direction on climate and public health policy as directed by the Colorado legislature and Gov. Polis.

As a first step, the Air Quality Control Commission (AQCC) considered in the fall of 2019 several new measures to help control pollution leaks and provide enhanced monitoring and reporting requirements. More than three dozen counties, and local public health departments joined thousands of other Coloradans across the state in support of stronger protections for our health and our climate leading the AQCC to unanimously adopt stronger rules by a vote of 9 to 0.

Several West Slope communities with oil and gas development are seeing increasing ozone levels that sometimes rise above [65 parts per billion](#) for ozone. And on the Front Range, air

quality continues to fail to comply with federal ozone standards and was recently reclassified as a “Serious” nonattainment area.

According to the American Lung Association, more than 500,000 Coloradans have asthma and more than 189,000 people have lung disease (COPD). Those populations are more at risk to the harmful effects of air pollution as well as other respiratory diseases.

“Moreover, cost-effective technology exists today so that the oil and gas industry can continue to operate in a cleaner, more responsible manner,” said Jacob Smith, executive director of CC4CA.

Strengthening methane rules will ensure more responsible oil and gas development and foster Colorado’s already burgeoning methane mitigation industry. Colorado’s methane mitigation industry already boasts more than 45 sites across the state including company headquarters, sales centers, equipment maintenance facilities, and leak detection and repair services. These companies provide family-wage jobs and employ everyone from high school graduates to PhD researchers and entrepreneurs.

Colorado Communities for Climate Action is a coalition of 34 counties, cities, and towns across Colorado, the majority on the Western Slope, working to strengthen statewide climate policy.

Western Leaders Network is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization of more than 300 local and tribal elected officials across the Interior West, working to protect western lands, air and water.

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