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To protect the health of our children, we must cut methane now

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by Paige Knight
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The natural beauty found throughout the Land of Enchantment has so much to offer our children while they grow and develop. Our youngest New Mexicans should also have equitable access to clean air and a healthy environment while they do so. But unfortunately, because so many families in our state live, work, and go to school near oil and gas facilities, that

access is anything but equitable.

According to [a new analysis](#) by Earthworks and FracTrack Alliance, nearly 39,000 children in New Mexico live within a half-mile of oil and gas production facilities, putting them and their families at an elevated risk for numerous negative health impacts like [asthma](#), [cancer](#), [fetal defects](#), [blood disorders](#), and [neurological problems](#). There are also 119 schools and child care centers in New Mexico that fall within the same half-mile threat radius, putting even more children – as well as the staff that work there – at risk.

These illnesses stem from the multiple toxins and carcinogens – like methane, toluene and benzene – that are released into the air during

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regular maintenance, pollution events, blowouts, or other equipment malfunctions that occur far too often during the oil and gas production process. Young children are most vulnerable to these smog-producing toxins because their lungs are still developing. The elderly, people who are pregnant, and rural and tribal communities are also at increased risk for illnesses from pollution, with many tribal communities [suffering from](#) disproportionately high pollution levels.

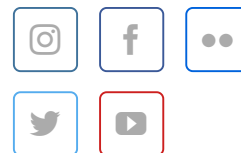
This pollution not only affects the health of our communities, but our planet as well. Methane, in particular, is extremely potent and has the ability to trap 80 times more heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. Continued methane emissions will only intensify the extreme wildfires, drought, heat waves, and other effects of climate change we already experience today.

Fortunately, taking action now to reduce methane emissions will have immediate benefits for the climate and our health. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [has made it clear](#): methane abatement is the quickest opportunity we have to slow the rate of our warming planet, because methane has a much shorter lifetime in the atmosphere compared to carbon dioxide. Thankfully, New Mexico’s Environmental Improvement Board has recently adopted [common-sense air and methane pollution rules](#) that will require oil and gas producers to significantly curb the amount of methane emitted by requiring more frequent well inspections to find and fix leaks.

This is an important step because [more than half](#) of the state’s total greenhouse gas emissions come from the oil and gas sector. Now that New Mexico is the second-largest oil producing state in the nation, we have an important role to play in the country’s response to these climate changing emissions.

It’s time for the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to follow in New Mexico’s footsteps. The EPA is considering [their own proposed rules](#) – which were released last fall and are currently under review – that would reduce methane and other harmful air pollution from both new and existing sources in the oil and gas industry.

A [supplemental proposal](#) from the EPA will be released in the coming months, and we urge the federal government to use [their full authority under the Clean Air Act](#) and ensure that necessary improvements are made to better protect the climate and frontline communities, like



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ensuring frequent leak detection and repair inspections at any polluting well wells and stopping the wasteful and harmful practice of routine flaring.

New Mexico – and the rest of our nation – has an obligation to make smart, equitable decisions for the future of our climate, children, and our communities, and to [enforce these safeguards](#) once established. Together, we can create positive change and ensure that not only our health and well-being are protected from the risks associated with oil and gas production, but also our Land of Enchantment – our forests, rivers, plains, and plateaus – remains a place for our children and families to not only live in, but where they can thrive.

Paige Knight is a Senior Research and Policy Analyst for NM Voices for Children

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STATE REVENUE ALLIANCE

625 Silver Ave. SW, Suite 195,
Albuquerque, NM 87102
Phone: 505-244-9505
Fax: 505-244-9509
Email: info@nmvoices.org



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