

Groups Say Colorado Must Push Forward for Strong Clean Air Rule

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Rulemaking commission should strengthen, not weaken, proposed oil & gas regulations

Denver, CO--(ENEWSPF)--January 31, 2014. A coalition of citizens' groups yesterday called on the state's Air Quality Control Commission to stand firm against an onslaught of moneyed interests looking to gut proposed revisions to the state's air pollution rules. The groups— Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, WildEarth Guardians and Earthworks, represented by the public interest law firm Earthjustice—also urged the Commission to strengthen the revisions to fully address threats to public health from the fracking-fueled boom of the oil and gas industry in Colorado.

The state's proposal would require the industry to identify and fix leaky equipment that emits smog-forming pollution and wastes valuable natural gas. It would further make Colorado the first state in the nation to regulate methane emissions – a powerful greenhouse gas – from the oil and gas industry. Proposed by the Air Pollution Control Division in November, the revisions will be considered for adoption by the Commission during a public hearing in February.

“The proposed rules are a promising start, significantly reducing the release of methane and other pollutants from Colorado's oil and gas operations” said Catherine Collentine, Colorado Campaign Representative for the Sierra Club Beyond Natural Gas Campaign. “But the rules must do more to protect our families, the air we breathe and our climate. While no regulations can make fracking entirely safe, the AQCC must ensure that Coloradans are better protected from the toxic and ozone-inducing emissions from fracking.”

The citizen groups' filing with the Commission responded to claims from special interests that the state is going too far in protecting public health and the environment and identifies specific provisions in the proposal that should be further strengthened.

“We urge the Commission to pay heed to community health and climate science which require that the rule be strengthened, not weakened,” said Bruce Baizel of Earthworks.

Although the state's proposal was developed in consultation with three major oil and gas companies that together control nearly 20,000 producing wells in Colorado, the powerful

industry trade groups Colorado Oil and Gas Association (COGA) and Colorado Petroleum Association (CPA) have launched a campaign to cripple the proposed protections.

“COGA and CPA try to paint the oil and gas industry as responsible corporate citizens but they are working to gut the very rules that would protect public health and the environment,” said Michael Freeman, staff attorney at Earthjustice. “COGA and CPA can’t have it both ways. Either they are willing to work with the state to clean-up their operations or they aren’t.”

In particular, the citizens’ groups filing yesterday strongly countered oil and gas industry demands that the new rules be limited to the northern Front Range. Such a change would carve most of the state out of the new protections.

“Coloradans on the western slope and in the Four Corners region don’t deserve second-class status when it comes to clean air,” said Robin Cooley, staff attorney for Earthjustice. “The Division’s proposal contains reasonable, common sense protections for our environment and public health that should apply to all of Colorado.”

Claims that the rules go too far and impose too great a burden on the oil and gas industry ignore the fact that there are simple and affordable options available to the industry to cut their emissions of toxic pollution and methane.

“Once again, COGA and CPA are following their standard playbook—‘it can’t be done, it’s too expensive,’” continued Freeman. “Our filings show that nothing could be further from the truth. Industry can meet the proposed requirements while still providing their product and turning a profit.”

The oil and gas industry is the largest source of smog-forming VOC pollution in Colorado. The Front Range and areas of the Western Slope are already violating the federal smog standard designed to protect public health. Without strong controls on the industry’s pollution, especially in light of the ongoing fracking boom, progress towards a healthy Colorado will be impossible.

“Colorado’s growing smog problem is an alarming sign of the toll that unchecked oil and gas drilling and fracking are taking on our health,” said Jeremy Nichols, WildEarth Guardians’ Climate and Energy Program Director. “Out-of-control ozone in Denver and on the West Slope should be a wake up call for everyone that the oil and gas industry needs to clean up its act in Colorado and throughout the American West.”

Source: earthjustice.org