

Colorado becomes first to limit methane emissions statewide

'Landmark' rules approved by commission

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AURORA, Colo. - The Colorado Air Quality Control Commission has approved landmark rules to reduce air pollution from oil and gas drilling, including the nation's first-ever regulations designed to detect and reduce methane emissions.

The ruling concluded a five-day public hearing that began Wednesday at the Aurora Municipal Center.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Air Pollution Control Division initiated the process more than a year ago.

On top of the methane restrictions, the approved rules include controls on smog-forming pollution.

In a statement released Sunday, Dr. Larry Wolk, the department's executive director and chief medical officer said:

“We are pleased the Air Quality Control Commission adopted these important measures. Protecting Colorado's public and environment is one of our greatest responsibilities, and we must ensure oil and gas development continues to adhere to the most protective standards. We're pleased that a group of environmental and industry leaders worked with our administration to help forge these landmark rules.”

Air Pollution Control Division Director Will Allison noted the original proposal, presented to the commission in November 2013 and largely adopted today, drew support from diverse environmental and industry interests.

Allison said, “Several industry leaders already implement some of the measures reflected in these

rules. Now, these protective, common-sense measures will be required of all operators across the state. We were pleased to have the input of numerous environmental, industry and government stakeholders.”

Gov. John Hickenlooper will provide comments on the adopted rules at a news conference Tuesday.

Several of Colorado's largest energy companies backed the plan, but some industry groups argued it should only be applied to parts of the state instead of statewide.

"Unfortunately, we were not successful in ensuring that the rule accommodates the differences in basins and operators," said Doug Flanders, a spokesman with the Colorado Oil and Gas Association. "Nevertheless, we are committed to working with our operators, our communities, and the state to successfully and effectively implement these rules.”

“This is a great day for residents living in the oil and gas producing areas in Colorado” said Sara Barwinski, a member of Weld Air and Water who testified before the AQCC on Friday. “The new regulations will significantly reduce air pollution that causes ground-level ozone and those hazardous pollutants that are also known to cause impacts to public health.”

Earthjustice attorney Michael Freeman represented a coalition of conservation groups in the rulemaking process that included the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, WildEarth Guardians and Earthworks Oil and Gas Accountability Project.

“The Commission has taken an important step to protect Coloradans from the smog generated by oil and gas development," said Freeman. "While more will be needed to meet federal air quality standards, we're pleased that Colorado is taking a big bite out of the problem.”

The Commission also directed staff to evaluate several options for additional air pollution measures such as regulating certain pneumatic devices that emit smog-forming pollution, and regulating downstream compressor stations, which are a substantial source of methane emissions.

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