

New Federal Legislation: Methane Emissions Research Act

January 4, 2023



Oregon's U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley, along with Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), recently introduced the Methane Emissions Research Act of 2022.

The bill is intended to empower the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to measure and quantify methane emissions from domestic oil and gas operations.

"In the short term, methane is at least 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide at warming our planet and is one of the worst offenders when it comes to contributing to the global warming that threatens our nation's economy and way of life," Merkley said. "Existing oil and gas infrastructure is leaking a tremendous amount of methane into the environment, and we need to stop those leaks both to cut our pollution and to demonstrate bold climate leadership internationally. The Methane Emissions Research Act is an essential step towards taking strong action to combating the disastrous impacts of methane pollution from the oil and gas industry."

“If we’re going to lead the planet to safety in the race against climate change, we’ve got to act quickly to curb the methane emissions spewing from oil and gas facilities,” Whitehouse said. “The Methane Emissions Research Act would help determine the true scale of methane emissions, which has been underestimated by the federal government for years. The EPA will be better positioned to eliminate methane leak sources with more precise data in hand.”

Oil and gas sector operations are a major source of methane emissions in the United States. Properly understanding the scale and characteristics of oil and gas methane emissions is a crucial scientific foundation for developing effective emission reduction policies. Unfortunately, significant data gaps regarding oil and gas methane emissions exist.

The Methane Emissions Research Act of 2022 would direct the EPA to measure and quantify methane emissions from specific oil and gas producing regions to backstop this limitation. The bill would create a pilot study as an initial one-time program, while requiring the agency to consider how the lessons of the pilot could be used to inform a recurring program on a national scale.

The Methane Emissions Research Act of 2022 would:

Direct EPA to conduct a two-year, measurement-based pilot study to quantify methane emissions from oil and gas infrastructure in two large oil and gas producing regions in the United States.

Encourage EPA to utilize innovative methane measurement and quantification technologies during the implementation of the pilot study.

Require EPA to submit a report to Congress upon the conclusion of the pilot study that includes:

The findings of the pilot study

An analysis of how the pilot study could be used to support the development of a comparable methane measurement and quantification research program encompassing all major oil and gas producing regions in the United States on a recurring basis.

An assessment of how the agency could utilize methane measurement and quantification activities to improve the quality of oil and gas sector methane data within Federal greenhouse gas inventories.
A description of any research gaps identified during the course of the pilot study.

The bill is a Senate companion to H.R. 8991, introduced by House Committee on Science, Space and Technology Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX-30).