

Evaluating New Mexico's oil, gas emissions

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Study shows state emits half the output of Texas

The nationally leading oil and gas regulations of the Lujan Grisham administration are having significant and positive impacts on greenhouse gas emissions from the industry. A study released the week of Nov. 7 by the environmental measurement and analysis firm Kayrros found that New Mexico's oil and gas operations emit half those of Texas, per unit. Texas's industry is far less regulated and often results in emissions traveling across state lines into New Mexico.

Noting that both Texas and New Mexico have experienced exponential growth in oil and gas production over the time period its study covers, Kayrros said the difference in emissions between the states can only be attributed to New Mexico's stronger regulations on methane waste and emissions.

"This study proves what we in New Mexico already know: we are doing the right things at the right time to produce the cleanest barrel of oil in the country. It also proves that state leadership matters – and New Mexico will not abdicate its responsibility to future generations," Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said. "But make no mistake: we are not slowing down to celebrate. We are all in on all of it: whether it's building state-of-the-art renewable energy, making more electric vehicles available to residents, shaping a cleaner oil and gas industry, or holding polluters accountable."

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The research also tracked the number of “super emitter” events in the Permian Basin since 2019. Their results showed that Texas recorded 106 super emitter events over that time period compared with 28 in New Mexico.

Days after entering office in 2019, Lujan Grisham issued Executive Order 2019-03 on climate change, which directed state agencies to develop comprehensive rules for reducing emissions from the oil and gas sector.

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas estimated to be 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. It generally gets into the atmosphere via leaks during the oil and gas production process, or when an oil and gas operator chooses to release or burn excess natural gas in processes known as venting and flaring, respectively.

Lujan Grisham thanked New Mexico's Secretary of the Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department Sarah Cottrell Propst and Environment Department Secretary James Kenney.

“I also want to applaud Secretaries Sarah Cottrell Propst and James Kenney for their incredible work to curb emissions from the energy sector in our state. Their efforts have been critical,” she said.

New Mexico's methane waste rules went into effect May 25, 2021. The rules require all operators to capture 98% of their produced natural gas by Dec. 31, 2026. The rules also prohibit routine venting and flaring.

The rules set out a schedule and a series of steps for operators to reach 98% capture. The governor implemented ozone precursor rules in tandem with the methane rules that require measures to reduce emissions at individual facilities and specific equipment over time. These rules also require more rigorous leak detection and repair requirements.

Since the adoption of the venting and flaring rules, the state has recorded a 36% reduction in gas lost and a 69% reduction in routine venting and flaring.

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“This has all happened at the same time that we have seen a significant increase in oil and gas production, showing that effective regulation is not a barrier to economic growth,” Cottrell Propst said.

Kenney said that while this is something to celebrate, there's still work to be done.

“While the 28 super-emitter events found in the Kayrros report are still too many, we are proud of our regulatory efforts and the industry's response to those efforts,” he said. “Our rules are helping New Mexico operators produce a lower-carbon barrel of oil than their counterparts in Texas.”

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