

[Climate Action Columbus Meeting](#)

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ENR 7981

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This meeting was organized by Cheryl Johncox of the Sierra Club methane campaign in Ohio. The methane campaign is a relatively new initiative of the Sierra Club. It started about two years ago, designed to support the EPA in passing rules to regulate methane emissions from oil and gas facilities. The group organized a bus trip to Pittsburgh for people to testify in support of these regulations last year. I wasn't able to go but submitted written testimony.

This summer the EPA [released finalized rules](#) on methane emissions from oil and gas facilities, but they apply only to new sources of emissions such as new fracking rigs. This is only a small percentage of methane emissions in the industry, especially since the cheap cost of gasoline over the past few years has meant few new fracking rigs are being built. However, existing fracking rigs are still going strong, and Cheryl said methane emissions from them are at an all-time high.

Now the EPA is looking toward writing rules to apply to existing sources of methane in the oil and gas industry. This is going to be a heavier lift than the rules applying to only new sources. First, the new source rule has already attracted opposition. Ohio attorney general Mike DeWine quietly joined several states in a lawsuit against the EPA over these rules; Sierra Club and several other states are countersuing in support of the rules. The states suing against the rules likely will not prevail, as it is likely they will be found not to have any legal standing. But the lawsuit is designed to delay implementation of the new source rules. Such legal challenges are pretty much a guarantee for rules applying to existing sources of methane emissions as well.

But the bigger challenge is that 2016 is an election year, and there is no way the EPA can go through the entire process of drafting, taking public comment on, and finalizing a set of regulations for existing sources of methane emissions before the next administration takes office. Of course we don't know who will win the election, and depending on who it is, that could have a major effect on whether these regulations move forward at all.

Methane is important because it is an extremely potent greenhouse gas, causing 86 times more warming than carbon dioxide. There are more carbon dioxide emissions than methane emissions from the fossil fuel industry, and methane hangs around in the atmosphere for only about 20 years as opposed to 100 for carbon dioxide. But even a small amount of methane does a lot of damage, and the next 20 years will be crucial for getting a handle on greenhouse gas emissions.

Even worse, we have been emitting a lot more methane than we realized from the oil and gas industry through leakage from pipelines and fracking operations. Based on this, Bill McKibben recently made the case that [fracking now poses the greatest threat](#) to the climate. A new report from Oil Change International and other groups finds that methane emissions from just [19 pending pipeline projects in the Appalachian region](#), if approved and built, would cause the United States to overshoot its commitment to the Paris climate agreement.

This is why we need to get regulations on existing sources of methane from the oil and gas industry passed. We spent the rest of the meeting brainstorming possible courses of action to do that. Eight people attended, including two students and a few old-time activists in the Columbus area. Most helpful was Chuck Lynd of Simply Living, who was full of ideas for actions.

Like Neil Waggoner, Cheryl also had 2000 postcards printed for people to sign expressing support for methane regulations. We can use these to stock tables at upcoming events such as the Sierra Club table at the Hot Times festival in September. In January the Sierra Club will hand deliver the Ohio postcards combined with postcards from four other Democrat leaning oil-producing states (California, Colorado, New Mexico, Pennsylvania) to the White House.

Another idea was a campout for climate in December to raise awareness of the effects of extreme weather on poor people who can't afford heating and air conditioning. This could be coupled with a coat or food drive, and could take place on Columbus Commons if we could get the permit. The timing would be after the election but before inauguration, so early December. I worry about the messaging on climate change in winter –deniers love to claim that cold weather proves global warming isn't real – but it could be a chance to make the point that winter does not disprove climate change. Another worry is that early December is a terrible time for students with term papers and finals, but the two students at the meeting said they would participate.

Other ideas included

- Putting together a letter in support of EPA methane regulations for the Ohio congressional delegation to sign. That would be mainly Democrats, but it would help.
- On September 12, there will be a Moral Mondays event at the statehouse modeled on the Moral Mondays protests in North Carolina. They have asked for other groups to participate, so we could go to campaign on the idea that climate is a moral issue.
- In October the Sierra Club will hold Cocktails for Climate with Mom's Clean Air Force.
- On November 10, France Moore Lappe will speak at The Vue – we could table there.
- We could put together a panel on climate change to pitch to Columbus Metropolitan Club. This could possibly center on the AEP solar request as a way to address it.
- We could build an email list for a Climate Action Response Team of people who could be ready to show up at events where they could advocate for climate issues.