

Position Paper Fugitive Methane Mitigation

Position

The goal of reducing methane emissions is becoming a high-profile issue in the discussion over climate change and a priority of the Obama Administration and many in Congress. Aging distribution infrastructure is a common source of methane leaks. Repair and replacement of these pipelines with leak-resistant piping made with polyethylene, polyamide, and spoolable composites would provide considerable relief from methane leaks. In addition, further expansion of gas gathering piping system capacity would take needed steps to mitigate the practice of “flaring” by shale gas developers. PPI supports policy that encourages the expansion of pipeline capacity with reduced methane emissions.

Background

According to the *White House Climate Action Plan; Strategy to Reduce Methane Emissions*, issued in March 2014, reducing methane emissions is a priority of the administration in addressing climate change. Methane currently represents nine percent of domestic greenhouse gas emissions, and according to the White House Action Plan, “putting methane to use can support local economies with a source of clean energy that generates revenue, spurs investment, improves safety, and leads to cleaner air.”

Industry and government studies have shown that at least half of the methane leakage from natural gas comes from drilling sites and processing plants (upstream emissions), and the rest coming from pipelines and storage systems (downstream emissions). Aging, leaky cast iron and bare steel pipelines can be upgraded or replaced with polyethylene, polyamide and/or spoolable composite piping that come with a proven track record of virtually leak-proof pipeline transportation of oil and natural gas.

Drilling site emissions can be better mitigated, starting with reducing venting and flaring of natural gas at the wellhead. While flaring systems serve a variety of safety purposes, intentional flaring of natural gas is all too common in certain shale plays in order to access crude oil, which enjoys higher market value.

The Bakken shale, for example, lacks sufficient gas gathering systems to transport and process gas from the well, incentivizing developers to flare a large volume of gas at their well sites. Conversely, Pennsylvania and Ohio are much farther along in building pipeline infrastructure in the Marcellus shale that can handle high volumes of natural gas. Expanding the gas gathering pipeline capacity helps decrease the need for long-term flaring.

The Obama Administration’s goal of reducing methane emissions by 45 percent by 2025 underscores the need for consideration of environmentally sound gas pipeline infrastructure. Utilizing polyethylene, polyamide and spoolable composite piping in distribution pipeline replacement plans as well as in construction of gas gathering pipelines will help mitigate methane escapes, reduce the wasteful practice of large-scale flaring, and create jobs.