

✖ [Dan](#) and [Ken](#) have offered quick takes on why the latest Trump [assault](#) on the environment is inexplicable — as they note, the oil industry doesn't need or want a rollback of rules that regulate methane emissions, and the compliance costs to industry are tiny. So what is the point of gutting a rule to regulate methane from oil and gas leaks?

The only explanation that makes sense is that the climate deniers in charge of the White House are in control. Reducing methane emissions is a really smart strategy for limiting temperature increases to safer levels, especially in the short term. So of course undermining that strategy is the point of the rollback.

Methane has two crucial qualities that make it different from carbon dioxide: It is [much more potent](#) as a heat-trapping gas and it has a much shorter life in the atmosphere.

Scientists estimate that methane [traps](#) 84 times the heat that carbon dioxide does, but that it stays in the atmosphere for only about a decade. As a result, reducing methane emissions gives us a lot of bang for the buck because the emissions are so energy-absorbing and because they do a lot of immediate/short term harm in the atmosphere. Indeed, the [United Nations](#) has stressed that reducing methane emissions is a critical strategy if we are to keep temperature increases to manageable levels. Methane has one other property that makes it especially troublesome as a greenhouse gas: it helps ozone form. Ozone is also a greenhouse gas. If we eliminate methane emissions, we help reduce ozone pollution as well.

Methane emissions are a huge contributor to global warming: they total about 25% of all greenhouse gas emissions. And global emissions have been increasing — [mysteriously](#) — as of late. Fracking may be the culprit.

The Trump Administration's strategy here seems simple to me. The rollback of the methane rule is not motivated by industry clamoring for regulatory relief. The motivation instead is climate denialism. The anti-science crusaders are in charge at the White House and EPA and they are winning. The planet is, of course, the loser.

It is worth stressing that the roll back hasn't happened yet and must go through a lengthy administrative process before it can be complete. If Trump is defeated in November, 2020, the methane rules may still be in effect and, if not, can be quickly reinstated.