

Study undermines EPA, blames rising methane levels on farming, not fracking

Valerie Richardson, Washington Times, 3-14-16

A newly released international study finds that farming, not fracking, is the likely culprit behind rising global methane levels, undermining the Obama administration's crackdown on methane from oil-and-gas production in the name of climate change.

The research published Friday in the journal *Science* came a day after President Obama unveiled a pact aimed at cutting methane emissions from oil-and-gas producers by 40 to 45 percent from 2012 levels by 2025.

Hinrich Schaefer, an atmospheric scientist at the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research in Wellington, New Zealand, and the lead author of the research team, called the results "a real surprise."

"That was a real surprise, because at that time the US started fracking and we also know that the economy in Asia picked up again, and coal mining increased. However, that is not reflected in the atmosphere," Mr. Schaefer told the website *Phys.org*.

He said agricultural practices are the likely reason for the spike of methane, or CH₄, in the atmosphere since 2007, not fossil fuels, as many have assumed.

"Our data indicate that the source of the increase was methane produced by bacteria, of which the most likely sources are natural, such as wetlands or agricultural, for example from rice paddies or livestock," Mr. Schaefer said.

The study was conducted by a team of scientists from New Zealand and Germany as well as U.S. researchers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research at the University of Colorado.

"The finding of a primarily biogenic post-2006 increase [in methane] is robust. Further, it seems like that fossil-fuel emissions stagnated or diminished in the 1990s. Importantly, they are a minor contributor to the renewed [CH₄]-rise," said the article.

The "most probably causes" of the methane spike are "either food production or climate-sensitive natural emissions," the study concluded.

The article also suggested that reducing methane emissions "must be balanced with the need for food production."

Mr. Obama announced last week an agreement with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to impose the stringent regulations on new and existing sources of methane from oil and gas production at a White House press conference.

The Environmental Protection Agency is scheduled to begin developing regulations "immediately," according to a White House statement.

The plan was hailed by environmental groups but denounced by pro-energy organizations, which argued that the rules will result in higher fuel and utility prices for consumers without making a dent in methane levels.

“Additional regulations on methane by the administration could discourage the shale energy revolution that has helped America lead the world in reducing emissions while significantly lowering the costs of energy to consumers,” said the American Petroleum Institute vice president of regulatory policy Kyle Isakower.

“The administration is catering to environmental extremists at the expense of American consumers,” he said.