



Plugging the pipes: Natural gas companies should work with EPA to reduce leaks | Opinion

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Marcellus Shale drilling. (File photo)

By **Guest Editorial**

By **Matthew Lam, Charlotte Levy, Anthony Notarobert, and Lakshman Balaji**

Pennsylvania powers America.

We understand the value of the resources under our feet and the hard work invested in obtaining them. We're not people to put up with unfair prices and waste resources. So, why are we literally letting tons of natural gas float away?

In 2015, the state calculated that [112,100 tons of methane](#) from unconventional (hydrofracked) wells went to waste, unused due to leakages in our gas wells. And that's on the low side; an outside estimate [suggested we may in fact be losing five times as much](#).

This missing gas is lost from cracked pipes, outdated compressors, and other aging equipment. But it's not lost from natural gas companies' balance sheets. Instead, Pennsylvania citizens are paying the price: [up to \\$131.5 million per year for gas they never receive](#).

These leakages don't just hurt your heating bill, however --they threaten basic public safety.

In 2011, a gas line ruptured and caused [an explosion in Allentown](#) killing five and injuring three. But between that disaster and today, [six more major explosions](#) have occurred across Pennsylvania, killing and injuring many and causing over \$38 million dollars of property damage.

Explosions like the one in Allentown are chance misfortunes, but it does not mean that we should ignore the underlying issue of leaking natural gas infrastructure and give those who responsible a pass.



The technology to make repairs is **neither new nor prohibitively expensive**. Besides getting positive news coverage, leakers actually save money by investing in new equipment in the long run by capturing lost product. For an estimated cost of only around \$500 per-site, an increase in production efficiencies and public safety are sure worth the price.

To keep their leaks in check and our natural gas companies accountable, we must, as Pennsylvanians, urge our companies to partner with the Environmental Protection Agency.

A voluntary commitment, the EPA's Natural Gas Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Program helps private companies meet emission reductions through annual reporting requirements and facilitation of information sharing in the industry.



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Gov. Tom Wolf must stand strong against waste from Marcellus shale drilling.

With input from experts at the EPA and accurate data reporting, we can rest assured that real changes are made in the pipelines. In fact, the program's promotion of technologies resulted in domestic emissions reductions of 51.4 Bcf in 2016, which is equivalent to \$155 million of natural gas.

Pennsylvania is an energy state; we know that the lights don't turn on by magic. And when we, as consumers, sign up for a service with a gas company, we are held accountable for making sure that every wattage of power is put to best use. So why are the energy producers not doing their due diligence themselves?

Considering the hazards and waste from natural gas being leaked, surely our power companies can, in turn, own up to their commitments by partnering with the EPA. Considering the natural gas industry's profit margins, this STAR program is a low-hanging fruit. Fortify the pipes and stop the gas leakages -- they are literally letting dollar bills float into the air.

Matthew Lam; Charlotte Levy, a Pennsylvania resident; Anthony Notarobert and Lakshman Balaji are students at Cornell University. They spent the past semester researching natural gas leakage in Pennsylvania.