

United Methodist Women Take Steps to Tackle Methane Pollution

Methane, the main component of natural gas, is a powerful greenhouse gas that is 87 times more potent than carbon dioxide when released into the atmosphere.ⁱ The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report highlighted the urgency of reducing climate pollutants like methane to stave off the harmful consequences of climate change. Additionally, exposure to these pollutants, most often from fracking, compression or distributions sites, and pipelines, have been linked to respiratory diseases, brain and spinal defects, cancer, congenital heart defects, low birth weight, heart attacks, preterm birth, and reproductive problems.

The United Methodist Women (UMW), an 800,000-member faith-based organization with members in every state and partners around the world, has been actively working with companies such as Chevron to voluntarily reduce leaks across the supply chain. UMW's advocacy included delivering almost 2,000 letters to the firm's corporate headquarters calling on Chevron's CEO to improve the company's performance on methane waste. "We are urging Chevron to reduce emissions of methane and other co-pollutants that harm the health of our grandchildren and God's earth," said Marlene Ward, president of Cal-Nevada Conference United Methodist Women and also part of the group delivering the letters. "Cutting methane emissions is one of the most cost-effective ways to address global warming today."

In August 2019, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed a rule change that would eliminate federal requirements that oil and gas companies install technology to detect and fix methane leaks from wells, pipelines and storage facilities.ⁱⁱ The UMW has sharply questioned this proposal. "Today over 15 million Americans live within a mile of oil and gas facilities," said Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee, executive for economic and environmental justice for. "Such leaks harm vulnerable communities and pollute God's creation."

At a recent public hearing on the EPA proposals, Cynthia Rives, national director of UMW, noted that, "Putting 'faith, hope and love into action' means taking seriously God's call in Genesis to be stewards of God's creation. As United Methodist Women, this means engaging in climate justice by not only changing our personal consumption patterns, but by ensuring all creation is protected – the earth and all that is in it, especially the 'least of these.'"

This story was provided to Creation Justice Ministries by United Methodist Women and appears in an abridged version in the 2020 Earth Day Sunday resource: The Fierce Urgency of Now.