# Oil, gas firms keep focus on eliminating emissions

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Jessica Lutz / New York Times

Oil and gas operators will continue their focus on eliminating methane emissions, working together on technology that will cost-effectively monitor for leaks and pinpoint where those leaks are located.

It's a new year, but the focus by Permian Basin oil and gas operators on eliminating methane emissions remains just as intense.

In fact, Jack Blears, director of E&P Technology Research with Darcy Partners, predicted that the use of technology like continuous monitoring will become even more important in 2022.

Speaking with the Reporter-Telegram by telephone after participating in the Oilfield Strong webinar presented by OTA Environmental Solutions, Blears offered three reasons operators are focused on eliminating methane emissions.

First, he said, a poll conducted by his company indicates operators are preparing for a more stringent regulatory environment under the Biden Administration. That applies to the amount of emissions reported to government agencies, he said, noting that operators tend to underreport the numbers they send to the Environmental Protection Agency. Efforts are underway to develop and expand the use of technology that will more accurately measure the amount and intensity of emissions, he said.

Secondly, operators want to prevent the loss of a valuable product by finding leaks and fixing them for good, he said.

And third, he said, companies are responding to investor pressure and market demand to eliminate methane emissions.

“There’s no silver bullet,” Blears said. “There are trade-offs.”

Continuous monitoring offers the best visibility on leaks, but the trade-off is cost, he said.

Companies can utilize a cost-effective broader survey to find leaks before “coming in with a fine-tooth comb.”

Satellites, fixed-wing aircraft and optical gas imaging cameras are being utilized, and drones are increasingly being utilized in leak detection. Drones can offer high-resolution visibility, flow low and get close to the course of leaks and eventually be programmed to fly fixed routes, he said. But, again, the downside is the cost.

Blears said there a lot of good options but operators will need a economic strategy for determining, for example, how many sensors will be needed for continuous monitoring and how high to place those monitors.

That is where industry collaboration comes in, and Blears says he sees less competition in this area than other areas. There’s still competition and companies try to differentiate themselves, but he said things change so quickly there’s a lot of collaboration.

Another issue is managing all the data that is generated from satellites, aircraft and sensors and organizing that data into usable forms and making it available on multiple platforms to ensure leaks are quickly found and repaired.

“You have to fix the leaks to actually reduce emissions,” he pointed out.

Companies want to be seen as leading in efforts to eliminate methane emissions and other ESG – Environment, Social and Governance – issues, such as certifying their efforts. The trend toward certifying natural gas production as responsibly sourced is growing, he said. That way companies can ensure that what they report to regulatory agencies or to the public is reality.

Another benefit of these initiatives is attracting or retaining employees, Blears said. He noted that there is heavy competition for workers right now and the industry’s reputation regarding the environment can be a hindrance.

“One of the most interesting things I read recently is that the number of energy professionals considering other careers is at an all-time high,” he said. Initiatives to help the environment can help keep them from choosing other careers or moving into renew-ables as well as attracting the next generation of professionals, he said.