

**MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM, GOVERNOR**

James C. Kenney, Cabinet Secretary

Jennifer J. Pruet, Deputy Secretary

NEWS RELEASE

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The Environment Department's mission is to protect and restore the environment and to foster a healthy and prosperous New Mexico for present and future generations.

Contact: Maddy Hayden, Communications Director
New Mexico Environment Department
505.231.8800 | maddy.hayden@state.nm.us

Embracing innovation and technology, the Environment Department identifies potential emissions violations

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) identified potential emission violations of methane and other air contaminants from oil and gas operations throughout the state using forward-looking infrared (FLIR) cameras. The FLIR video footage collection is now included on the Department's online interactive [methane map](#). NMED created and periodically updates this map to provide the public with information on how oil and gas operations directly impact their communities.

Footage available on the map now includes FLIR videos received from citizens the Department believes depict potential violations of existing state permits or regulations. The map also contains FLIR videos documenting significant emissions from the Department's recent flyover compliance inspections.

"The Department is addressing oil and natural gas emissions through innovative compliance assurance measures today as we invest in methane regulations for tomorrow," said NMED Cabinet Secretary James Kenney. "The emissions documented in many of these videos are unacceptable to this Department and pose significant health and safety risks to New Mexico communities and employees of these companies."

In response to footage received from citizens that may depict potential violations, NMED is sending written notices to oil and gas operators seeking an explanation for and correction to the documented emissions within 14 days. If the operator does not reply in writing to the notice or document the corrections made, the Department may launch an investigation or proceed directly to civil enforcement, which may include the assessment of penalties.

Also as part of NMED's ongoing compliance assurance activities, helicopter flyovers were conducted in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in September and October of 2019. Using FLIR cameras, leaks were identified from flares, tanks and other types of oil and gas equipment. The Department is reviewing the footage to determine if facilities are in compliance with applicable permits and regulations. Of the approximately 5,340 storage tanks observed, 111 were emitting methane and other pollutants at the time of the flyover. Of the approximately 530 flares observed, 13 were unlit and emitting methane and other pollutants.

NMED and EPA plan to conduct additional flyover inspections in the near future.

Emissions from oil and gas operations contribute to climate change as well as the formation of ground-level ozone. Several counties, including some in southeast New Mexico, are experiencing increased ozone levels. Aside from adverse public health effects, increasing ozone levels may result in more stringent federal sanctions, including more rigorous permitting requirements.

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Kristine Yurdin, Non-Discrimination Coordinator | NMED | 1190 St. Francis Dr., Suite N4050 | P.O. Box 5469 | Santa Fe, NM 87502
(505) 827-2855 or nd.coordinator@state.nm.us

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