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Accessed August 10, 2016, <http://www.ncwarn.org/2016/06/whistleblower-epa-official-covered-up-methane-leakage-problems/>

## **“Whistleblower: EPA Official Covered up Methane Leakage Problems across US Natural Gas Industry”** — News Release from NC WARN

June 8, 2016

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Inspector General called to investigate scientific fraud that wasted crucial years in slowing climate crisis while risking safety of workers, communities

Durham, NC – A watchdog group today charged that a high-ranking federal official connected to the fossil fuel industry committed scientific fraud and possibly criminal misconduct in a case with sweeping ramifications for global climate change and the safety of workers and neighbors of natural gas sites across much of the United States. The group called for an expedited investigation due to the urgent climate and safety implications of the EPA’s failure to curb widespread methane emissions.

NC WARN, a 28 year-old climate and energy justice nonprofit, filed a 68-page complaint today with the Inspector General of the US Environmental Protection Agency based on written evidence and testimony provided by the engineer who invented the primary technology used to measure leakage and deliberate venting of natural gas. The complaint says the device’s severe underreporting of emissions during two high-profile studies has ramifications for releases of methane at hundreds of thousands of tanks, drilling sites and other gas equipment around the world.

The complaint alleges that Dr. David Allen, then-head of EPA’s Science Advisory Board, has led an ongoing, three-year effort to cover up underreporting of the primary device, the Bacharach Hi-Flow Sampler, and a second device used to measure gas releases from equipment across the natural gas industry. Allen is also on the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin, where he has been funded by the oil and gas industries for years.

The studies were published in 2013 and 2014 by the Environmental Defense Fund as concerns were rising about the climate impacts of methane emissions from hundreds of thousands of gas wells being drilled as the fracking gas boom raged in a number of US states. While many other studies during the period increasingly showed alarming levels of methane emissions, the 2013 EDF study, led by Allen, showed far lower emissions, and it has been used persistently by the gas industry to argue that methane leakage is low and that EPA should back off efforts to begin reducing methane emissions.

Leading researchers now consider the natural gas industry to be the foremost greenhouse gas problem in the US, largely due to methane emissions. That’s because methane is 100 times

stronger than carbon dioxide at trapping heat over the first ten years, and because methane levels in the atmosphere above the US have risen sharply since the fracking boom began, according to researchers from Cornell, Harvard, Stanford and elsewhere.

NC WARN director Jim Warren said today, “The EPA’s failure to order feasible reductions of methane leaks and venting has robbed humanity of crucial years to slow the climate crisis. The cover-up by Allen’s team has allowed the industry to dig in for years of delay in cutting emissions – at the worst possible time.”

The underreporting flaw with the Bacharach device is well-documented. It had been raised by an EPA researcher before the Allen 2013 study – and now even its manufacturer admits to the flaw, although hundreds of the devices are still being used in gas-producing countries. But it was engineer Touché Howard, the inventor of the technology, who proved the flaw existed and showed that emissions could be underreported in the Allen studies by up to 100-fold.

In its complaint, NC WARN says that, despite Howard’s warning and years of experience as a leading expert and consultant on measuring methane emissions for various study teams, Allen moved ahead with promotion of the two studies that used the flawed data. He also refused to discuss the problems with Howard while telling EDF, EPA and others that all was okay. NC WARN says it appears other EPA officials and researchers declined to confront Allen due to his stature.

A group of state attorneys general has pressed EPA since 2012 to get a handle on just how much methane is leaking across the natural gas industry. NC WARN said it will seek support for the investigation from those attorneys general, and from social justice, labor and environmental groups.

As with other federal agencies, the EPA’s Office of Inspector General is a watchdog over potential misconduct within the agency. The OIG has investigative powers and can refer criminal matters to the Justice Department. In 2014, the OIG criticized EPA for poor work on methane emissions.

Touché Howard and NC WARN emphasize that leakage and routine emissions at well sites and other gas facilities could be damaging local community health while creating explosion risks for workers. Howard said today, “We simply don’t understand the level of emissions across this industry. It’s almost certainly higher than studies have shown, and EPA’s reliance on inaccurate information has created a disincentive to take feasible steps that could greatly reduce the emissions.”

NC WARN found and approached engineer Howard during research for an ongoing battle to stop Duke Energy from making a rapid shift toward the burning of shale gas.

Cornell University’s Dr. Robert Howarth, a leading researcher of methane emissions, said today that engineer Howard’s concerns must be openly resolved: “Touché Howard has done an impressive job of synthesizing information on the problems with the Bacharach instrument. From the start, the paper by Allen and colleagues in 2013 seemed to have unusually low

estimates for methane emissions from shale gas, certainly in comparison to most of the other recent literature. Howard makes a convincing case that instrument failure explains at least part of the problem with the work of Allen and colleagues, and quite possibly with other studies upon which the US EPA has relied.”

Cutting methane is crucial. Rapid heating is underway over the past six months that could signal abrupt acceleration of global heating, other weather extremes and sea level rise that could spell worldwide chaos within just a few dozen years. Prominent scientists believe there remains very little time to reverse that process.

Cornell’s Howarth argues that cutting gas-industry methane emissions is essential to slowing global warming quickly enough to avoid the tipping point toward runaway changes. In the complaint, NC WARN calls for EPA to institute a zero emissions policy for methane venting and leakage throughout the natural gas industry, noting that engineer Howard insists that great reductions are practical.

Jim Warren added today: “Fracking for gas and oil must also be stopped for a host of reasons. We’re reaching out to communities, workers, advocates and elected officials to join the call for an investigation into EPA’s scientific fraud. The People of this nation must demand that regulators and politicians reject the pervasive pressure of corporate money, stop coddling the polluters – and do their jobs on behalf of the public.”

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See the NC WARN complaint to the EPA inspector general

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