

# Waste of natural gas costing taxpayers millions

WASHINGTON (AP) — Significant amounts of natural gas on federal lands are being wasted, costing taxpayers tens of millions of dollars each year and adding to harmful greenhouse gas emissions, a congressional investigation has found.



**A natural gas well pad sits in front of the Roan Plateau near the Colorado mountain community of Rifle, Colo. Significant amounts of natural gas on federal lands are being wasted, costing taxpayers tens of millions of dollars each year and adding to harmful greenhouse gas emissions, a congressional investigation has found.**

The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office also said the Bureau of Land Management failed to conduct production inspections for hundreds of high-priority oil and gas wells — roughly 1 out of 5 — to ensure full payment of royalties to the U.S.

The report, obtained by The Associated Press before its public release, is the latest to highlight substantial gaps in oversight. An AP review of government records last May found the agency, which manages oil and gas development on federal and Indian lands, had been overwhelmed by a boom in a new drilling technique known as hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

The GAO report said it had been urging BLM, an agency of the Interior Department, to update guidelines for the burning or venting of natural gas since at least 2010, when it found 40 percent of it could be captured economically and sold. BLM has yet to do so, although agency officials now

say they are in the process of putting together various orders and a proposed rule for comment later this year.

Until then, government investigators called BLM's management of oil and gas "high-risk" for waste and fraud.

"The Interior Department has known for at least a decade that companies have been wasting natural gas from oil and gas wells on public lands," said Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore. "Venting and flaring natural gas from these wells hurts the environment and

speeds up global warming, and it shortchanges the taxpayers."

He joined Reps. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., and Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz., the top Democrat on the House Committee on Natural Resources, in calling on the department to redouble efforts to stem waste, rather than give "drilling companies a pass to let millions of taxpayer dollars evaporate into thin air."

Companies that drill for natural gas pay the federal government a royalty on the gas they extract; they are also allowed to burn or release

publicly-owned gas from wells in certain amounts for free.

But GAO said BLM was underestimating the amount of gas vented and flared and failing to collect royalties for that gas. Based on data from the Environmental Protection Agency, the GAO calculated in 2010 that the government was losing at least \$23 million annually in lost sales, an amount that environmental groups say has since grown due to increased drilling activity.

Much of the vented gas is methane, a greenhouse gas roughly 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Using EPA estimates, the GAO concluded that capturing the vented gas would be the equivalent of removing 3.1 million cars from the road or closing four average-sized coal-fired power plants.

Pieter Tans, lead scientist of the Global Greenhouse Gas Reference Network at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said methane is an important contributor to global warming, but that carbon dioxide emissions remained the No. 1 target. "It's more easy to do something about methane than it is to do something about CO<sub>2</sub>," he said.

## BRIEFLY

### Teacher arrested after burning students with Tesla coil

SALEM (AP) — An Oregon science teacher who police say used a Tesla coil to burn the phrase "I love mom" into the arms of students has been charged with criminal mistreatment.

Salem Police Lt. Steve Birr says 37-year-old Samuel Dufner was arrested Tuesday at South Salem High School.

Birr says students used the coil in an exercise last Thursday. Dufner noted it could also be used to mark the skin and asked for volunteers.

Dufner burned "I love mom" — with a heart to symbolize the word love — into their arms.

A parent complained Friday, starting the investigation.

Dufner posted \$2,000 bail. The Salem-Keizer School District placed him on leave.

Birr says the markings had mostly faded.

The Tesla coil transmits electricity without wires at high frequency and high voltage levels.

### Health officials close recreational shellfish harvest

BELLINGHAM, Wash. (AP) — State health officials have closed all recreational shellfish harvesting on beaches in northern Whatcom County after tests found unsafe levels of a biotoxin.

The State Department of Health announced the closure on Wednesday for beaches from Sandy Point north to the Canadian boarder, including Points Roberts.

Testing detected unsafe levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning, or PSP, biotoxin in molluscan shellfish. These include clams, mussels, oysters and scallops.

This was the second biotoxin-related closure in less than a month. Officials say the algae that contains the toxins can't be seen and must be detected by laboratory testing. The department of health provides test results on its website.

Officials say shellfish sold in restaurants and markets have been tested before distribution and are safe to eat.

### No charges in shooting death of man who was strangling woman

EUGENE (AP) — Prosecutors won't be charging the 70-year-old Dorena man who shot and killed his friend to stop him from strangling a woman.

The *Eugene Register-Guard* reports Jerry Dale Risener said he didn't have a choice when he shot 49-year-old Mitchell Demopoulos in the chest.

An argument broke out in January between the two and a female tenant at Risener's house, where the three had been drinking. Demopoulos started strangling the woman, and prosecutors say he threatened to kill Risener and burn down his house.

Risener asked him to stop, and shot him when Demopoulos continued to strangle the woman.

Prosecutors say the shooting was legally justified.

# Idaho man admits using meth, killing police officer

By KEITH RIDLER  
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — An Idaho man told investigators he used a 9mm Glock handgun hidden in his coat pocket to shoot and kill a police officer because he feared the officer would find the weapon, according to court documents released Wednesday.

The records said 26-year-old Jonathan Renfro of Rathdrum told authorities he shot Coeur d'Alene police Sgt. Greg Moore early Tuesday then stole his patrol vehicle.

Renfro said he used methamphetamine the day before the shooting, which was recorded by the officer's body camera.

Moore was checking on a suspicious person while patrolling a neighborhood when he was gunned down.

He died later that evening.

"Renfro is observed shooting Sgt. Moore," Idaho State Police Senior Detective Michael A. Van Leuven wrote in an affidavit that describes images from the camera worn by Moore. "After being shot, Sgt. Moore falls to the ground, causing his body camera to point skyward. A short time later Renfro's face comes back into the frame. Renfro is seen using a flashlight while searching Sgt. Moore's person."

A Post Falls police officer later spotted the stolen police vehicle and gave chase with speeds reaching 125 mph but found the vehicle abandoned. Law enforcement agencies set up a perimeter and Renfro was apprehended several hours

later after a police dog found him hiding under a truck and dragged him out.

"From the information I've received so far, it doesn't look like an ambush-style attack," Coeur d'Alene Police Chief Lee White said. "This was just a bad guy doing bad guy stuff and our officers doing what they were trained to do — and that's trying to keep our communities safe."

Renfro faces several felony charges, including murder, attempted murder and grand theft.

The documents say Moore's service pistol was found near Renfro, and a second 9mm pistol was found in a nearby field with Moore's flashlight and Renfro's eyeglasses.

Renfro was being held on \$2 million bail.

His attorney, John Adams of the Kootenai County Public Defender's office, didn't return a call from The Associated Press.

One of the court documents is a request by Adams for a gag order barring anyone involved in the case from discussing it with news media.

Hundreds of people gathered at a candlelight vigil Tuesday for the veteran police officer, some traveling from out of state and others paying tribute to the sacrifice of a lawman they didn't know.

"It's just amazing that people who don't even know him, they come out and support everything he stood for," Don Eckles, a close friend of Moore, told *The Spokesman-Review* newspaper of Spokane, Washington.



Renfro

## Corrections

An article in the May 2-3 weekend edition of the *East Oregonian* misspelled the name of the operations manager at Williams Northwest Pipeline's Plymouth, Washington facility. His name is Von Studer.

The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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