

REPORTING LOCAL IMPACTS OF OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT:

FLARING - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a flare?

Flares are used to burn away gases at oil and gas facilities that would otherwise be vented to the atmosphere. Burning those gases in a flare, rather than venting them, helps to prevent explosions and limits potentially harmful air pollutants, such as hydrogen sulfide (H₂S), from being emitted. However, improper or excessive flaring can be wasteful, and can result in air pollution or other harmful impacts.

How much smoke or flaring is normal?

A properly operating flare is bright orange and produces some smoke, appearing “marbled.” But smoke that is especially thick can be harmful, and the operator may need to make adjustments to the flare to keep it from producing soot.

Texas has rules that limit the amount of gas that can be vented or flared, and for how long. It can be difficult for a non-expert to visually observe how much gas is being released.

Normally, flares are not allowed to burn for more than 6 months, but there are some exceptions to that rule. Additionally, oil leases can release gas through flaring or venting indefinitely,¹ as long as the volume of gas released is less than 50,000 cubic feet per day –enough gas to fill more than a dozen 18-wheeler trucks.² Gas wells can release gas through flaring or venting indefinitely as long as the volume of gas burned is less than 15,000 cubic feet per day -or enough gas to fill about four 18-wheeler trucks.

If you have concerns, you can call the Railroad Commission of Texas to find out whether a certain flare is in compliance with state rules.

Is flaring dangerous or harmful to my health?

A flare that is not burning completely will look small and faint, and you might not see much smoke -if any- coming from the flare. In that case, the flare system may be generating other air pollutants that can be harmful to your health and the climate.

Excessively smoking flares produce soot that is harmful to human health and the climate.

A properly operating flare is generally safe, although flares do emit air pollutants that can build up in the atmosphere, form ozone (AKA “smog”) that affects human health, or contribute to global warming.

Who do I call if there is a problem?

- **Odor, smoke, or health complaints:** Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- **Volume or duration of flaring:** Railroad Commission of Texas

¹ Oil leases may contain more than one oil well, while gas leases may only contain one gas well.

² Assume 4,000 cubic feet per 18-wheel truck.