

GAS FLARING IN NORTH DAKOTA



In the Bakken shale area of North Dakota, oil producers burn millions of cubic feet of natural gas as waste every day. Environmental advocates criticize the practice as wasteful and polluting, but state regulations are weak and federal ones are nonexistent.



A flare near Ray, N.D. The flared gas also spews at least two million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year, as much as 384,000 cars or a medium-size coal-fired power plant would emit.



At a well site near Stanley, N.D., a flare burned in the distance as a trucker loaded his rig with crude from the well. Drilling leases are typically short, and building the infrastructure to handle the gas for sale would substantially raise costs, so drillers have found it to be more profitable to just grab the oil and burn the gas.



Troy Anderson, the lead operator at Whiting Oil and Gas Corporation's Robinson Lake Gas plant in New Town, N.D., examining an inlet pipe that brings gas into the plant for processing. "I'll tell you why people flare," he said. "It's cheap. Pipelines are expensive."



Whiting Petroleum is constructing a 24-inch gas pipe from a gas gathering site near Belfield, N.D., to a processing plant it is building nearby. Whiting sees particular value in the gas found here because it contains large amounts of propane and butane that it can extract and sell at a profit in addition to the gas itself.