

Calif. bills to halt fracking fail to win support

By Laura Olson, Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee and other papers, Friday, May 31, 2013

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Attempts to place a moratorium on the controversial oil drilling technique known as fracking failed as the Legislature hit its first bill-passing deadline, but the industry almost certainly will face stronger regulations when this year's legislative session is over.

An Assembly bill to temporarily halt hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, did not win enough support to pass that chamber. A Senate measure will be amended to remove its proposed moratorium.

Instead of halting the practice as many environmental groups sought, lawmakers are seeking regulations that would require the disclosure of chemicals used in the process, oversight of wastewater disposal and increased public notification.

After Friday's legislative deadline, two broad bills remain from nearly a dozen measures introduced earlier this year on the issue. Another measure passed the Senate to increase bonding amounts that oil and gas drillers must post in case a well is abandoned.

Environmentalists have raised concerns about potential impacts from fracking, which involves injecting water, sand and chemicals into deep rock formations to release oil or natural gas.

As state lawmakers debated bills this week, a coalition of environmental groups launched "Californians Against Fracking" to lobby for a fracking ban. They fear the practice will harm California's air and water.

Fracking could allow the petroleum industry to access lucrative shale oil deposits in California's San Joaquin Valley. Drilling companies say they've safely used fracking for decades in shallow traditional wells.

Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, authored SB4, which requires a scientific study on the environmental effects of fracking, testing of nearby groundwater before and after drilling, and calls for creating a state website for compiling data on fracking chemicals.

Pavley's measure calls for halting fracking if the scientific study is not completed by January 2015, a provision she promised to have removed in the Assembly.

California environmental regulators also are crafting regulations for fracking, which they aim to approve next year. But environmental advocates and some Democratic lawmakers say state regulators have done too little to keep up with the industry.

"They really aren't doing a very good job," Pavley said during Wednesday's floor debate.

Her measure passed the Senate on a 27-11 vote. But an Assembly bill to halt fracking while officials studied environmental and health impacts was not as successful.

That bill, AB1323 from Assemblywoman Holly Mitchell, D-Los Angeles, was revised in the Appropriations Committee to halt fracking until state regulators issue their pending guidelines.

The amended bill received 24 votes, short of the 41-vote majority. Two other moratorium bills were killed in a committee meeting.

Republicans defended the practice during floor debate, saying the increased industry activity it would bring will help Californians seeking work.

"Let's unleash this magnificent potential for jobs," said Assemblyman Jim Patterson, R-Fresno.

Brian Nowicki of the Center for Biological Diversity said in a statement that "public opinion is on our side and a growing number of courageous legislators are determined to fight fracking pollution."

A broader regulatory measure from Assemblyman Bob Wieckowski, D-Fremont, didn't pass the Assembly, but could still see a vote later this year. The bill requires chemical disclosure, an annual report by regulators on fracking activity, and increases the time period for reviewing permits.

Wieckowski's bill, AB7, was amended Friday to include provisions from another bill calling for groundwater testing, which failed to get enough support to clear the Democratic-controlled Assembly.

Taft joins protest against fracking restrictions

Council approves letter opposing bills calling for halt to oilfield production practice

Taft Midway Driller, Thursday, May 28, 2013

Efforts to halt hydrofracking and impose a tax on oil at the state level have the City of Taft upset, so the Taft City Council last week approved letters to Sacramento protesting several bills aimed at the oil industry.

A letter to Assemblymember Shannon Grove outlined the city's opposition.

"The bill would potentially increase energy costs, jeopardize jobs and eliminate a source of future revenues to the state and local governments."

Hydrofracking is the practice of pumping fluids at high pressure into oil-bearing formations to break up the rock, allowing the oil to be pumped out more more easily.

Environmental groups have opposed the practice, claiming in endangers underground water supplies

The city is also mad at Sacramento because of a proposal by Gov. Jerry Brown to eliminate enterprise zones

The city worked for several years to get an enterprise zone designation, Which allows it to offer tax incentives to businesses in the area to relocate here or grow and has been marketing it extensively.

Brown proposed eliminating the zones to capture more tax revenue.