Docs Can't Reveal Drilling Chemicals to Public

JULIE CARR SMYTH, Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Doctors given new access to the proprietary chemical recipes that oil and gas drillers use to crack into Ohio shale would be prohibited from sharing the information with the public under an energy proposal moving through the Ohio House.

Environmentalists liken the restriction to a gag order on medical professionals. Drilling companies say it's necessary to protect trade secrets.

On Tuesday, the Ohio State Medical Association, Ohio's largest doctors' group, said the wording of the provision could keep physicians from complying with mandates for public-health reporting.

"The OSMA strongly believes that physicians should have access to all of the relevant information needed to deliver high-quality medical care to their patients," senior director of government relations Tim Maglione wrote in a letter to Public Utilities Chairman Peter Stautberg. "This information also needs to be shared with other medical providers who are contributing to caring for a patient."

The association urged lawmakers to clarify the provision so that chemical trade secrets can be shared with public health and regulatory agencies. Environmental groups testified earlier the wording could also prevent doctors from sharing chemical information with first responders to chemical spills at well sites.

Ohio Department of Natural Resources spokesman Carlo LoParo said the legislation makes proprietary chemical information from drillers available to doctors for the first time. He said medical professionals responding today to a plant explosion or chemical spill would not receive as much information as will be made available from drillers.

Well operators are generally required under the bill to report the chemicals they are using in the hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, the high pressure drilling technique used to blast chemical laced water into shale formations to release oil and gas resources.

Chemical reports on file with the state list each chemical's trade name, supplier, purpose, ingredients, identifying code, and percentage within the fracking fluid. In certain instances, the word "proprietary" is used in place of ingredients or an identifying code. The purpose and percentage are still listed.

Similar limits on medical professionals have become law in Pennsylvania and other drilling states. The rules are distinct from new chemical disclosure guidelines in the Ohio bill.

The Ohio legislative committee continued to debate the provision, part of a wide-ranging energy bill, on Tuesday. A committee vote was expected to come Wednesday.

Maglione said he was hopeful the committee would make the association's proposed changes to the bill before it clears committee.

"Doctors are permitted to get that information, which is a good thing," he said. "But the second provision says you can't do anything else with it. So what we're asking is for clarification."

Besides drilling regulations, the bill lays out other rules for Ohio's growing oil and gas industry and adjusts to Ohio's alternative energy standard to include waste heat.

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