Ohio Legislators to Vote on New Drilling Rules

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Rules regulating oil and gas well construction, water handling, and the disclosure of chemicals used in drilling were ready to clear their final legislative hurdles Thursday and head to Gov. John Kasich.

The Ohio House was scheduled to vote Thursday on the new regulations governing hydraulic fracturing in the Utica and Marcellus shale formations running under sections of the state. They are part of a wide-ranging energy bill that also addresses Ohio's clean energy standard and makes dozens of other changes.

Barring further amendments to the bill, the Ohio Senate was prepared to concur on House changes later in the day. That would send the bill to Kasich, who is expected to sign it.

Some environmental groups turned against the bill Wednesday after a provision was added limiting who can sue energy companies for chemical trade secrets. Among them were the Ohio Environmental Council and the Sierra Club, which had previously been neutral.

The Kasich administration said it fought to guarantee that owners and adjacent neighbors of well properties could file trade secret challenges. Environmentalists argued, however, that the language requires all others to show current or potential harm from the secret chemicals before a lawsuit would be allowed.

The language could also preclude the environmental groups themselves from waging legal battles against drillers over their trade secrets, though they could sue on behalf of an affected person.

Other provisions of the bill are being touted as among the toughest in the nation.

Well operators would be required to disclose within 60 days the chemicals they used to initially drill and hydraulically fracture, or frack, a well. Fracking is a high-pressure drilling technique that involves blasting thousands of gallons of water into the earth to fracture shale formations and release gas, oil and natural gas liquids.

The bill also would require chemical reporting when operators first drill through underground drinking water sources. Chemicals used to service or plug a well could be requested by state regulators.

The legislation also would allow doctors treating people injured during well construction and production to share proprietary information with not only other medical providers but with public health agencies and the patient.

Well operators would face mandatory daily fines of up to $20,000 for safety and

environmental violations.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/28/2014 - 5:11am*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2012/05/ohio-legislators-vote-new-drilling-rules