Shale Drillers Must Report Chemicals Used

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Under a new state directive a list of toxic chemicals used by Ohio shale drillers must be made available locally to governments, first responders an

d residents. Ohio officials notified companies that a federal chemical disclosure law trumps a 2001 state law requiring that the information only be filed with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, The Columbus Dispatch reported Monday. The state gave companies until Sept. 21 to begin complying with the federal law.

The guidance affecting the state's burgeoning hydraulic fracturing industry follows an April letter in which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency made clear that Ohio's chemical-reporting laws don't supersede federal right-to-know requirements. The letter came in response to a complaint by a coalition of environmental and community groups involving a January chemical emergency near St. Marys in Auglaize County.

The reporting change will benefit residents in areas of Ohio where fracking is abundant, said Teresa Mills, whose Center for Health, Environment and Justice spearheaded the complaint. "They can go to their local emergency planning commission and ask for these records," she told the newspaper. Her group, the liberal ProgressOhio and the Buckeye Forest Council have also called on the federal government to consider suspending Ohio's authority to oversee deep wells used for disposal of the chemically laced wastewater that results from using the hydraulic fracturing method to drill for oil and gas. They cited a Youngstown-area businessman's federal indictment for alleged Clean Water Act violations and a spate of eastern Ohio earthquakes tied to deep injection.

The federal right-to-know law allows oil and gas companies to shield some chemicals from the inventories it releases as trade secrets. Among chemicals used in the process that may be listed are: ethylene glycol, which can damage kidneys; formaldehyde, a known cancer risk; and naphthalene, a possible carcinogen. A

leader of Ohio's oil and gas association said the state chemical disclosure law was intended to centralize and ease access to information about the chemicals used in drilling.

Ohio Oil and Gas Association vice president Tom Stewart told the Dispatch the new directive will make it more difficult for firefighters to learn what chemical hazards they might encounter at a shale well fire. "We changed the law so fire departments could rely on the annual reports we make to (Natural Resources), which would be inserted into an emergency response website," Stewart said.

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