

NJ To Ban All Fracking Waste

WAYNE PARRY, Associated Press

New Jersey lawmakers are considering a ban on treating or storing waste products created by natural gasdrillers.

A state Senate committee advanced a bill on Monday that would prohibit the treatment, discharge, disposal or storage of any wastewater, solids, sludge or other byproducts resulting from hydraulic fracturing, a technique commonly known as fracking.

The procedure injects water and other fluids into the ground at high pressure to break rock structures and free natural gas deposits trapped in them. Some of that water, along with large quantities of existing underground water, returns to the surface, and it can contain high levels of salt, drilling chemicals, heavy metals and naturally occurring low-level radiation.

The process has significantly added to natural gas supplies and lowered their price, but has also caused concern about water contamination and other environmental problems.

Favored by environmentalists and opposed by business groups, the bill now goes to the full Senate for consideration.

"We don't know what's in all this waste, and what we don't know not only can hurt us but do a lot of damage," said Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club.

Tracy Carluccio of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network, said waste products from fracking are already being sent to and treated by New Jersey industrial facilities — often with little knowledge of what is in them.

Business groups said the bill is not needed, even as they defended the practice as beneficial to the nation's energy security and economic well-being.

Edward Waters, an official with the Chemistry Council of New Jersey, said hydraulic fracturing is "a game-changer" in the energy market.

"There is bipartisan support nationwide for natural gas development, all the way up to President Obama," he said.

Gov. Chris Christie vetoed a similar bill passed by the previous legislature, saying it appears to violate the interstate commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution. But Michael Pisauro of the New Jersey Environmental Lobby, said the bill is constitutional because it treats all fracking waste equally, regardless of its source.

Currently, there are no fracking operations anywhere in New Jersey, and no plans

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for any in the immediate future.

The bill says that fracking "has been found to use a variety of contaminating chemicals and materials," that "millions of gallons of contaminated water flow back out of the well, and that the companies engaging in the use of this drilling technique have been less than forthcoming in revealing the 'cocktail' of chemicals and their concentrations and volume."

The hearing came a week after five minor earthquakes were recorded in an area of northeastern Ohio where state regulators have ordered a gas drilling company to halt operations.

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