

Ohio lawmakers OK tougher rules for new oil and gas wells

COLUMBUS

State lawmakers have given final, bipartisan approval to legislation requiring water testing near new oil and gas wells, increased disclosure by drillers and online public notice of permits.

The actions followed lengthy hearings and debates in both chambers and over continued objections from some Statehouse Democrats and environmental groups, who say the legislation favors oil and gas companies at the potential expense of public safety and the environment.

The final vote on Senate Bill 315 was 73-19 in the House, with the Senate concurring on amendments, 21-8, sending the legislation to Gov. John Kasich.

Rob Nichols, the governor's spokesman, said Kasich will sign the bill.

SB 315 includes numerous provisions related to the state's energy laws, with language related to advanced and renewable energy, water conservation and wastewater treatment.

Supporters say it would implement some of the most stringent fracking-related regulations in the country, requiring increased disclosure of fracking chemicals and water usage, water well sampling within 1,500 feet of proposed horizontal wells and so-called "cradle-to-grave" documentation and tracking of oil and gas wells from the time they started until they are capped.

Shipments of brine and other waste fluids would have to be disclosed prior to injection into disposal wells, with additional requirements for brine transporters. The bill also would require increased inspections of wells and liability insurance coverage for well owners.

The House added language requiring oil and gas permits to be posted online for public review within two days of approval.

Lawmakers also amended the bill to enable property owners or others adversely affected by fracking fluids to sue to force drillers to release details of proprietary chemical mixtures.

Another provision requires well owners to submit quarterly reports on brine and waste fluid disposal.

The House removed language that would have required drillers and pipeline companies disclose the country of origin for tubular products used in wells.

"It's our goal, through this legislation, to make sure that we address this expansion and new technology in an appropriate and responsible manner," said Rep. Peter Stautberg, a Republican from southwestern Ohio and chairman of the House's public utilities committee, in urging support for the bill.

He added, "Our goal through Sub. SB 315 is to push the ball forward, to move the ball down the field and do better and do more and make sure that our water sources are protected, our people are protected, that appropriate safeguards are in place for our natural resources. There is a balance to be struck."