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## EPA to require S. Calif. offshore fracking reports

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LOS ANGELES — Oil and gas companies that are fracking off the Southern California coast must report chemicals discharged into the ocean under a new rule released Thursday by federal environmental regulators.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published the requirement in the federal register, and will become effective March 1.

The move comes after a series of stories by The Associated Press last year revealed at least a dozen offshore frack jobs in the Santa Barbara Channel, and more than 200 in nearshore waters overseen by the state of California.

Hydraulic fracturing, which involves pumping huge amounts of sand, water and chemicals deep underground to release oil, was conducted with no separate environmental analysis of the



FILE - In this May 1, 2009 file photo, offshore oil drilling platform 'Gail' operated by Venoco, Inc., is shown off the coast of Santa Barbara, Calif. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published a new rule on Thursday, Jan. 9, 2014 requiring oil and gas companies to report chemicals discharged off the Southern California coast from hydraulic fracturing. The rule goes into effect on March 1, 2014.

fracking chemicals on the sea surroundings, and little or no oversight.

"This requirement was added in response to recent concerns regarding the potential effects

of discharges of fluids used for offshore hydraulic fracturing operations," the EPA said in its notice.

The oil industry has insisted that fracking, which has been

around for decades, does not harm the environment.

While attention has been focused on fracking on land close to communities, little is known about the practice in the ocean, which uses far less fracking fluids.

Well permits and emails obtained through the Freedom of Information Act show fracking has quietly occurred off Southern California since the late 1990s with mixed success.

After the AP stories were published, the California Coastal Commission launched an investigation. A group of state lawmakers also called on the federal government to look into the practice.

The new EPA rule applies only to new drilling jobs on nearly two dozen grandfathered-in platforms in federal waters off the Santa Barbara coast, site of a 1969 oil platform blowout that spilled more than 3 million gallons of crude oil, ruined miles of beaches and killed thousands of birds and other wildlife.

Separately, state oil regulators have drafted rules requiring companies to test groundwater and alert landowners before fracking or other well stimulation. Companies would also have to disclose the chemicals used and acquire permits before a job. Those rules go into full effect in 2015.

Environmentalists said the new federal rule was a step in the right direction, but they still want the government to ban the practice altogether.

“The EPA’s rule will provide some information about the toxic fracking chemicals dumped into our ocean, but it relies on oil companies to be honest and transparent in their self-reporting,” said Miyoko Sakashita, senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity.