

# THE SACRAMENTO BEE



## Editorial:

## Legislature needs to ensure disclosure of fracking

By the Editorial Board

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Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is a drilling technique used to extract oil and gas embedded in geologic formations thousands of feet below the surface of the earth. Huge quantities of water and sand mixed with chemicals are pumped at high pressure into well bores. That creates or expands fissures that facilitate the movement of gas and oil to the surface.

Increasingly sophisticated fracking technology has kicked off an energy boom across the country. It has put tens of thousands of people back to work and reduced the country's dangerous dependence on foreign oil.

But there's legitimate concern that fracking poses a risk to the environment and public health, particularly in California. Our state is home to the 1,750-square-



mile Monterey Shale Formation, which stretches from Los Angeles to Modesto. The formation contains an estimated 15.4 billion barrels of oil, fully two-thirds of the nation's shale oil reserves.

But as fracking intensifies - going deeper than ever before and adding a horizontal drilling component, a risky practice, particularly in earthquake-prone California - demands for better regulation have grown.

A dozen or so bills have been introduced in the Legislature so far this session. Some call for an outright moratorium on fracking. That goes too far.

Sen. Fran Pavley's Senate Bill 4 is the most comprehensive and the most thoughtful. Among other things, the bill would require an independent scientific study to look at the environmental and health risks that fracking may pose, and its possible impacts on seismic activity.

It would require the state Division of Gas and Geothermal Resources, DOGGR, to adopt fracking regulations that include full disclosure of chemicals used. If public health were at risk, health professionals and other regulators would have the opportunity to challenge drillers' claims that public disclosure could undermine trade secrets.

In addition, the legislation would require fracking operators to obtain permits and disclose the amount and sources of water used. People who lived near fracking sites would be allowed to have baseline and follow-up water testing of wells and surface water.

A gas and oil production fee would be increased to pay for the added oversight.

Energy companies oppose the Pavley bill and point out that fracking has been used for decades in California without damaging the environment or public health. But because regulation has been virtually nonexistent, that claim is impossible to verify.

The oil industry also opposes the Obama administration's attempt to ensure greater disclosure of chemicals used in fracking. The industry claims such regulation is better handled by states. But in duplicitous fashion, it also opposes state regulation.

In response to questions from Pavley, DOGGR was unable to identify where and how often hydraulic fracturing occurs within the state. The division was unaware of the amount of energy produced through fracking, or the amount of water used to extract that energy. Officials said they had no known reports of damages occurring due to fracking but

because "there are no reporting requirements ... the division has no data on the safety, efficacy and necessity of hydraulic fracturing as currently employed in California."

Fracking may well be a cost-effective and reasonably safe way to unlock energy reserves that are cleaner than some alternatives, particularly coal. It may put thousands of people back to work in some of the most economically depressed areas of this state. But government has a responsibility to ensure that the environment and public health are not damaged in the process or that the state's precious water supplies are not dangerously depleted or polluted.

Pavley's SB 4 would be an important step in that direction

Read more here: <http://blogs.sacbee.com/capitol-alert-insider-edition/2013/05/editorial-legislature-needs-to-ensure-disclosure-of-fracking-chemicals.html#storylink=cpy>