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## Oil regulators revise proposed fracking rules

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A flood of public comments has prompted state regulators to tighten up proposed rules governing fracking, acid matrix stimulation and other enhanced oil recovery techniques starting next year.

The California Department of Conservation, citing 150,000 comments filed since draft rules were rolled out in November, clarified and made modest adjustments to several measures that would be required of oil field operators.

Among the new measures are more detailed engineering reviews prior to well stimulation work and greater public disclosure of where oil companies get their fracking water, and what they do with it afterward. The measures also would distinguish between the use of acids for well maintenance and enhanced oil recovery, and force fracking companies to report

earthquake activity magnitude 2.0 or greater to the California Integrated Seismic Network.

While the oil industry welcomed the changes as transparent, environmentalists criticized them as inadequate for protecting air and groundwater quality.

The department unveiled the amendments Friday and discussed them with media Tuesday. Public comments are being accepted until July 28, and the new rules would take effect Jan. 1.

The proposed changes did not address a complaint by oil companies that the rules do not clearly spell out how they are supposed to monitor groundwater quality during and after fracking operations. Greater clarity on that point is expected to come from state water officials in July 2015.

The proposed rules are based on last year's Senate Bill 4, the first California law specific to enhanced oil field techniques such as fracking. Also known as hydraulic fracturing,

the process injects water, sand and sometimes toxic chemicals underground at high pressure to release oil and gas. Environmentalists have targeted the process -- along with acid matrix stimulation, a related technology that uses corrosives to make oil formations more permeable -- as potentially polluting.

The trade group Western States Petroleum Association said the updated draft "appears to be in line" with the state's commitment to transparency and collaboration with the industry and the public.

The Center for Biological Diversity, however, called the proposed changes "a huge gift to oil companies" because they don't require fracking operations to capture possible methane releases, allow regulators to approve whole clusters of frack jobs at once and permit acid-based well maintenance work to proceed with less paperwork than acid matrix operations.

Another membership-based environmental group, Clean Water Action, raised similar objections, while also calling for new rules on oil field wastewater disposal, which state officials view as a separate process governed by federal rules.

But the group noted it was pleased to see improved water reporting requirements, new seismic monitoring and more detailed information for regulators.