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Texas bill would require disclosure of chemicals used in fracking

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A state legislative bill that would require disclosure of chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing is drawing support from both environmental groups and energy producers.

Rep. Jim Keffer, R-Eastland, chairman of the House Committee on Energy Resources, filed HB3328, which would take effect Sept. 1 if passed. Also listed as bill authors are two Democrats, Reps. Lon Burnam of Fort Worth and Mark Strama of Austin, and two Republicans, Reps. Myra Crownover of Denton and Tan Parker of Flower Mound.

Southwestern Energy, a large independent natural gas and oil producer based in Houston, supported the measure, said Mark Boling, executive vice president and general counsel.

"Energy and the environmental groups have tried to get together on this, and I hope we have done that with this bill," Boling said. "I think it's something that will be good for the community and good for the industry. ... We believe there's a whole lot more that the industry and environmental groups have in common than everybody realizes."

At least two environmental groups, the Environmental Defense Fund and Texas League of Conservation Voters, back the bill.

"Industry has opposed mandatory disclosure for far too long," said Scott Anderson, the fund's senior policy adviser. "EDF supports full disclosure of all chemicals used" in hydraulic fracturing.

Keffer's bill "is truly a win-win for industry, environmental groups, legislators and the public at large," Anderson said.

David Weinberg, executive director of the League of Conservation Voters, called the bill "a positive step forward for Texas."

"Texans expect transparency, especially when it comes to their public health and safety," he said.

The league said the bill provides "necessary disclosure" of chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing, a technique used to boost production of crude oil and natural gas, but also ensures "reasonable trade-secret protection for companies."

Critics of "fracking" worry that it can contaminate groundwater used to provide drinking-water supplies and that surface spills of fracturing fluids can pollute rivers and creeks.

Fracking is used in the completion phase of a well after it has been drilled.

Huge volumes of water and sand, coupled with much smaller volumes of chemical additives, are pumped into a wellbore under high pressure to open fractures in rock, allowing the release of natural gas and oil.

Ed Ireland, executive director of the Barnett Shale Energy Education Council, said the group, which includes natural gas producers, would take a look at Keffer's bill, which was filed Friday.

Legislation is also pending in Washington to require federal regulation of fracking, including disclosure of chemicals.

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