

Fracking industry groups angered by delays, comments

Jon Campbell
Albany Bureau

ALBANY — The natural-gas industry expressed frustration Monday with the state's ongoing review of hydraulic fracturing, with one trade group saying its trust in state government has been "exhausted."

The Independent Oil & Gas Association of New York sent a letter to Gov. Andrew Cuomo, urging him to have his Department of Environmental Conservation release its long-awaited final report on large-scale hydraulic fracturing and to move forward with issuing permits.

The letter came in advance of a Nov. 29 regulatory deadline, which if

missed would require the DEC to reopen its proposed regulations to public comment.

"The lives and livelihoods of hundreds of New York families are now at great risk," IOGA Executive Director Brad Gill wrote in the letter. "The unnecessary delay in concluding this rule-making process is a serious problem for the upstate economy."

Last week, the state Department of Health confirmed the names of three outside experts who will assist in reviewing the DEC's efforts to limit or prevent potential health impacts from hydrofracking, a technique in which water, sand and

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chemicals are injected into underground shale formations to fracture the rock and release natural gas.

One of the experts — Lynn Goldman, dean of George Washington University's school of public health — said that last week she was informed the independent review should be wrapped up by "mid-February at the latest."

The DEC's report — known as the Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement — was first launched in July 2008 and must be finalized before permits for high-volume hydrofracking are issued. That report won't be completed until the health-specific review is completed, ac-

ording to the DEC. Members of the gas-trade group were "hopeful" the state would meet the November deadline, but are now "well past the tipping point."

A DEC spokeswoman did not immediately respond Monday to requests for comment.

Katherine Nadeau, water and natural resources program director for Environmental Advocates of New York, said Cuomo has to ensure the "many significant questions about fracking's impacts are answered before permitting is considered."

"IOGA's letter says it all — the gas companies believe the state should care more about their bottom line than the public health and well being of the millions of New Yorkers who will be affected if fracking is permitted," Nadeau said.

Meanwhile, a second industry-funded group mailed the Department of Health on Monday, criticizing its choice of outside experts to assist in the review.

Energy in Depth — an effort funded by gas-industry trade groups — took issue with previous fracking-related comments made by Goldman and Richard Jackson of the University of Califor-

nia, Los Angeles, while disputing the findings of a report co-written by John Adgate of the Colorado School of Public Health.

"To be clear, we believe the three experts selected can provide valuable input in this review," Energy in Depth Executive Director Lee Fuller wrote. "But in order to meet the demands of New York residents — who deserve and strongly support a fair, open and independent process — we encourage the state of New York to consider additional experts to allow for a true diversity of perspectives."

In an update sent to its members Monday, Catskill Mountaineer called the three academics "highly qualified medical experts." But the group, which has called for a ban on fracking, called on the Cuomo administration to bring more transparency to the process and reveal exactly what the experts will be reviewing.

"Although the caliber of the experts that have been selected for this task is very high, there are still major problems with this process," the group wrote.

JCAMPBELL@gannett.com
Twitter.com/JonCampbellIGAN

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