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New fracking comment period slated

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ALBANY — Beginning Dec. 12, the public will have a new chance to comment on New York's proposals for shale-gas drilling, the state announced Thursday.

The Department of Environmental Conservation posted 90 pages of newly revised, proposed regulations for hydraulic fracturing, a required step to receive a three-month extension of a deadline for finalizing the rules.

Part of that three-month extension will include a 30-day comment period from Dec. 12 until 5 p.m. Jan. 11.

Environmental groups have rebuked the DEC for seeking the extension, saying any revisions should wait until the

state receives input from a panel of academic health experts. The three experts were asked earlier this month to give the state advice on how to prevent or limit the potential negative effects of hydrofracking, a much-debated technique used to fracture shale formations and release natural gas.

"Ignoring the ongoing health and environmental review processes by rushing new rules that have to be finalized by the end of February appears to be either politically motivated or messy administration at the expense of all New Yorkers," read a statement from the New York Water Rangers, a coalition of fracking critics.

A DEC spokeswoman did not respond to a request for comment.

The state first launched an environ-

mental review of large-scale hydrofracking in 2008, and the technique has been on hold in New York ever since. The DEC has said it won't approve any permits for the process until that review is completed.

Earlier this week, a statewide group of landowners looking to lease their gas rights to drillers said it was "cautiously optimistic" that "an end is in sight to the over 4.5-year-long regulatory process."

"New York landowners, farmers, businesses and taxpayers hope that New York can finally bring an end to this process and begin realizing the environmental and economic opportunities enjoyed by our neighboring Marcellus Shale states," the group said.

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