

Newsom to announce ban on new fracking projects

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BY COLBY BERMEL, DEBRA KAHN | 04/22/2021 04:00 PM EDT



Gov. Gavin Newsom is briefed while touring the Chevron oil field in McKittrick, Calif. | Irfan Khan/Los Angeles Times via AP, Pool

California Gov. Gavin Newsom is planning to announce a ban on new hydraulic fracturing permits, according to multiple sources.

The announcement could happen Thursday or Friday, the sources said.

Impact: The announcement would come the week after state lawmakers voted down a closely watched bill to ban fracking and other fossil fuel extraction techniques. Newsom had asked lawmakers for such a proposal last fall after arguing he didn't have the authority to ban fracking on his own. Now the governor, facing an all-but-certain recall election, is feeling simultaneous pressure from environmentalists, who slammed him for not doing more to advance the fracking bill, and deep-pocketed drillers, who could spend against him this fall.

Details: Environmental, legislative and industry sources said Newsom would ban new fracking projects by 2024. They said the governor's new plan could rely on his emergency powers, or just simply direct state regulators to use their existing authority.

A spokesperson for Newsom's office did not immediately respond to an inquiry about the announcement.

Background: California is one of the largest oil-producing states in the country — it ranks seventh in the nation for crude oil production and 14th for natural gas production, according to federal data.

While fracking makes up a relatively small proportion of the state's oil production relative to conventional drilling and other techniques like cyclic steaming and water and steam flooding, the practice has taken on symbolic significance for climate and environmental justice advocates. Newsom has previously sought to minimize the role of fracking, saying it makes up just 2 percent of California production. But industry groups claim that figure is actually 17 percent, setting up a fight over how significant a fracking ban would actually be.

Last month, the interstate Delaware River Basin Commission banned fracking within the watershed of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, adjacent to the fossil fuel-producing Marcellus shale basin. Vermont, Maryland and Washington have also banned fracking, but those states have few, if any, proven reserves.

Fracking directive: Last September, during a record-breaking wildfire season, Newsom signed an executive order to ban new gasoline-fueled vehicles by 2035, citing climate change's effect on the fires. Included in that order was a directive for state lawmakers to stop fracking by 2024. Two state senators produced this bill, but Newsom was later tepid in his support for the measure.

That bill, [CA SB467 \(21R\)](#), was blocked in committee last week by three moderate Democrats. After that defeat, SB 467's environmental justice sponsors [announced they would retool the bill](#) to focus solely on 2,500-foot setbacks, or buffer zones between new drilling and sensitive sites like homes, schools and hospitals. That approach has the support of state Senate leadership, as long as its authors have enough votes ahead of a hearing next Tuesday.

During the fallout from the bill's failure, Newsom last Thursday hinted at an upcoming announcement, saying that "you'll be hearing a lot more from me on this topic very, very shortly."

The governor defended his hands-off approach to SB 467, saying the bill's defeat "shows you how challenging it is even in a Democratically-dominant Legislature" to pass contentious climate legislation.

What's next: Newsom hasn't yet publicly announced any events for the rest of this week. Meanwhile, the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee meets next Tuesday, but SB 467 is not yet on the panel's hearing agenda.

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