



Rules proposed recently by New York State for regulating a controversial form of natural gas drilling are drawing expressions of guarded optimism from the natural gas industry but objections from some environmentalists, who say they do not go far enough in protecting water supplies.

Environmental groups say that the state has moved toward a safer plan in its latest draft rules, especially by banning the drilling, known as horizontal hydrofracking, in state parks, wildlife preserves, and watersheds and aquifers that supply drinking water to New York residents. But it is still coming up short, some say, on issues like mapping buffer zones where drilling would be banned.

Those zones may not be big enough to protect old water tunnels that carry water from the watersheds to New York City from drilling vibrations and drilling fluids, those groups argue. Hydrofracking involves blasting millions of gallons of water mixed with chemicals and sand into rock to extract natural gas.

And while the state plans to go further than elsewhere in the country in terms of disclosure — companies will be required to specify the chemicals and formulas they use, even those considered proprietary, to state officials if not always to the public — environmentalists point out that the draft does not prohibit the most toxic chemicals used in fracking, like benzene.

“It’s disappointing,” said Katherine Nadeau, the water and natural resources program director for Environmental Advocates of New York. “New Yorkers have said repeatedly they don’t want their drinking water exposed to toxic chemicals.”

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