

Pavley, Wilk Natural Gas Safety Bill Moves Forward

Scott Wilk and Fran Pavley, Santa Clarita Valley Public Television, 4-13-16

Sen. Fran Pavley's and Assemblyman Scott Wilk's urgency bill to ensure that natural gas injections into the Aliso Canyon storage facility do not resume until a rigorous regimen of well-safety tests is completed was approved without dissent today by the Assembly Appropriations Committee and is now headed for consideration on the Assembly floor.

"It is essential this moratorium legislation go into effect as soon as possible so any new injections of natural gas and the use of vintage wells for production at the Aliso Canyon storage facility, are safe and do not pose a risk to public health or safety," said Wilk. "I applaud Senator Pavley for her leadership on this issue and look forward to continue working with her in fighting for residents of Porter Ranch."

SB 380 will establish a moratorium on any new injections of natural gas and use of vintage wells for production at the Aliso Canyon storage facility until a determination has been made by selected state agencies and outside experts that the site, specifically the old 1950s wells, does not pose a risk to public health or safety. The measure will also consider how to minimize or eliminate use of the facility while still maintaining energy reliability in the region. SB 380 builds on the order issued by Governor Jerry Brown in his State of Emergency proclamation.

Senator Pavley told the committee her SB 380 strikes a balance to provide energy reliability for the Los Angeles region while not compromising public safety at the site of a disastrous gas leak that spewed nearly 100,000 metric tons of methane during the four months it raged out of control.

The fumes sickened thousands of residents, led to the closure of two schools and forced the relocation of about 6,000 families from the nearby Porter Ranch community, some of whom have yet to return.

"It is false choice to think we must either protect public safety or provide energy reliability," said Senator Pavley. "We can do both. What we're seeking to do is to make sure that the Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) and Southern California Gas Co. thoroughly investigate the safety of all wells, as promised."

Joining Wilk and Pavley in presenting the bill were co-authors Senator Bob Huff of San Dimas.

"Public safety is government's first priority," said Senator Huff, a principal co-author of SB 380. "Aliso Canyon must never again pose a risk to public health or safety. This bill strikes a balance between maintaining energy reliability in the region and safety."

Under a comprehensive testing regimen developed by DOGGR in consultation with independent scientists, all 114 wells at the site will have to undergo sound and temperature testing to detect leaks. No well could resume operations until it has undergone four additional tests for well integrity and been certified as safe. The bill would allow for limited operations to resume from safety-certified wells, as long as all wells that have not yet been fully tested are shut down and isolated from the storage reservoir.

DOGGR expects sound and temperature testing of all wells to be completed by the end of this month. Southern California Gas Co. said last week it would be possible to meet those stringent safety standards and also resume limited injections from safety-certified wells by late summer.

The testing regimen required by DOGGR is consistent with the provisions of SB 380.

SB 380 is supported by U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein, who calls its approach “exactly the right way to go.”

The bill was unanimously approved by the Senate in January. A date for a vote in the Assembly has not yet been set.

A second bill by Senator Pavley, SB 887, would reform safety standards at all 14 natural gas storage facilities across California. It is scheduled to be heard next week by the Senate Environmental Quality Committee.