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New Round of Comments on Drilling

By MIREYA NAVARRO

Gov. David A. Paterson ordered state environmental officials on Monday to complete revisions to their proposed standards for a controversial type of natural-gas drilling by June and submit them to a new round of public comment.

In his executive order, Mr. Paterson said hydraulic fracturing combined with horizontal drilling required a comprehensive review of possible environmental impacts before its “deployment” in the state. He gave officials with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation until June 1 to publish “a revised draft” of the standards and accept public comment “for a period of not less than 30 days.” They may also schedule hearings, the order said.

The department had been working on issuing final environmental standards for drilling permits after holding hearings on an earlier draft proposal last year and receiving more than 14,000 written comments. But the governor is making the department hold off on a final document until the public has a chance to see what changes were incorporated.

Peter M. Iwanowicz, the department’s acting commissioner, said many of the comments have criticized the proposed standards for failing to adequately address issues like the cumulative impact of multiple drill sites, disposal of wastewater from the drilling and the protection of drinking water. He said “it behooves” the next administration to incorporate the range of different issues in the revised draft.

“It’s one of these issues New Yorkers care very, very deeply about,” he said.

A spokesman for Governor-elect Andrew M. Cuomo had no comment on the executive order, saying all executive orders from the previous administration

were subject to review. But during the campaign, Mr. Cuomo said that although drilling was important to the state economically, it also had to be safe.

Since the environmental department had not set a date for finalizing its standards, it is not clear by how much Mr. Paterson's order further delays horizontal hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, on the Marcellus Shale in the state.

The governor's order said no drilling permits could be issued until completion of the final standards "subsequent to the conclusion of the public comment period," meaning July 1 at the earliest. Mr. Iwanowicz said drilling could theoretically begin in 2011, "but a lot of it depends on how the issues are addressed by this draft."

The drilling uses the high-pressure injection of water, sand and chemicals to more economically release gas deposits.