

EU wants common rules for shale gas 'fracking'

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A general view of a site where energy company IGas has permission to carry out exploratory drilling for shale gas at Barton Moss in Manchester on January 13, 2014

The European Commission wants EU member states to accept common environment and health rules if they use controversial 'fracking' to develop shale gas resources.

A document prepared for the Commission's 2030 Energy and Climate Package due Wednesday recognises the importance of the [shale gas](#) revolution, which has driven US [gas prices](#) down sharply, but also recommends strong regulation.

"Experts agree that shale gas extraction leads to higher cumulative environmental risks and impacts compared to conventional [gas extraction](#)," said the draft document, seen by AFP on Friday.

If such "environmental and health risks, lack of transparency and legal uncertainties remain unaddressed, public concerns will persist," it said.

Accordingly, it recommended a series of measures the 28 EU member states to follow if they wanted to develop shale gas.

For example, they should "ensure that a strategic environmental assessment is carried out" before project approval, to gauge the risk to other resources, such as water supplies.

The public should also be "informed of chemicals used in fracking," it said.

Environmental reporting should be transparent, it added.



Members of the Greens/European Free Alliance group hold banners reading "stop fracking" before a vote in a plenary session of the European parliament on two initiative reports on shale gas, in Strasbourg, eastern France, on November 21, 2012

The recommendations are at this stage non-binding but the Commission said it would "closely monitor" their implementation and encouraged member states to adopt them as best practice.

It said it will report again in 2015 and at that point could "decide to put forward legislative proposals."

Fracking involves the injection of chemicals and water under very high pressure to fracture shale rock formations deep underground and so release the gas and oil they contain.

Widely used in the United States, it has been heralded as an "energy

revolution", helping put the US economy back on track with US companies benefitting from much cheaper energy prices.

That has sparked calls, notably from Britain, for the EU to adopt light-touch regulation on shale gas but others such as France oppose fracking given the environmental concerns.

The Commission package due next week will replace its current programme which lays down a target for a 20 percent reduction compared with 1990 levels in [carbon dioxide emissions](#) by 2020.

In addition, EU member states are supposed to source 20 percent of their energy from renewable sources and achieve a 20 percent energy efficiency gain by the same date.

The European Parliament's environmental committee wants a 40-30-40 package but this looks ambitious, with member states focused on getting a economy back on track rather than add to business costs.

Against this backdrop, the future of shale gas is expected to be a major bone of contention in fixing the 2030 guidelines.

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