

September 13, 2022
9:14 AM GMT-5
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Exclusive: Colombia's Ecopetrol asks to suspend fracking contracts for 90 days

By Luis Jaime Acosta

2 minute read



The entrance of Ecopetrol's Castilla oil rig platform is seen in Castilla La Nueva, Colombia

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BOGOTA, Sept 13 (Reuters) - Colombia's state-run oil company Ecopetrol ([ECO.CN](#)) has asked the oil regulator to suspend contracts for two fracking pilot projects for 90 days, the company and two sources told Reuters on Tuesday.

The two projects - being developed in Santander province by Ecopetrol and U.S. oil major Exxon Mobil Corp ([XOM.N](#)) - have faced stiff resistance from environmental groups and could be halted outright if a law backed by the administration of new leftist President Gustavo Petro passes congress. [read more](#)

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"Last Friday we asked the (national hydrocarbons agency) to temporarily suspend the Kale and Platero contracts for a term of 90 days," a company spokesman said, without confirming the reason for the request.

Ecopetrol may want to pause spending until the fate of the anti-fracking law is decided, a source familiar with a matter said.

"The suspension looks to open a waiting space while the future of the pilots is defined," they said.

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The hydrocarbons agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Advocates of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, have long argued that developing non-conventional energy deposits is vital for Colombia's economy and energy self-sufficiency.

The country's non-conventional deposits have potential output of up to 9 billion barrels, the government says.

Oil is Colombia's top export and source of foreign exchange and the country has some 7.6 years worth of reserves.

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Approval for commercial development of non-conventional deposits was the subject of a long legal battle in the country's highest administrative court.

The court in July paved the way for development when it ruled against a lawsuit looking to nullify fracking rules. It had previously approved the pilot projects.

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Petro promised on the campaign trail to bar fracking in

favor of a transition to renewable energy.

His government has backed the new bill proposed by an anti-fracking coalition - its fourth attempt to ban the practice - and activists are optimistic about the law's chances for success.

Anti-fracking activists said this year they were facing increased threats and violence from unknown assailants, with some campaigners forced to flee in fear for their lives. [read more](#)

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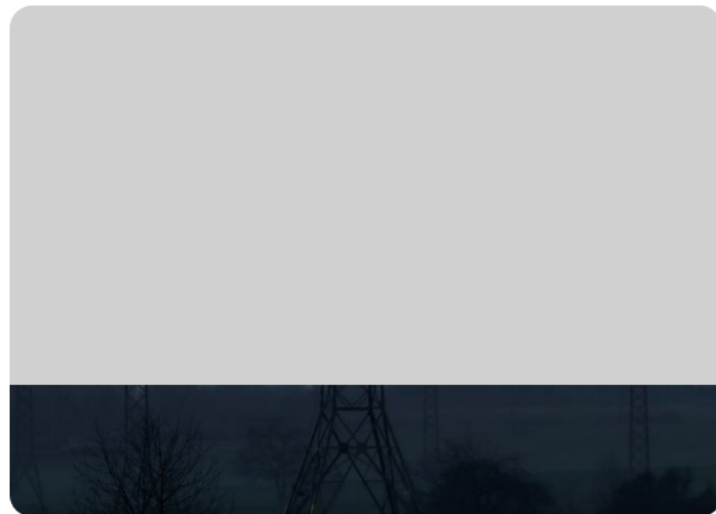
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