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## Texas' Earthquake Study Gets Off The Ground

by Deon Daugherty | Rigzone Staff | Tuesday, September 22, 2015

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The \$4.5 million study is intended to provide big picture information on whether there is a link between hydraulic fracturing's disposal wells and seismic activity.

Work is underway on the multi-million dollar TexNet Seismic Monitoring Program, designed by Texas lawmakers to gather and disseminate research on any relationship between disposal wells and an unexpected spate of earthquakes in North Texas.

Rafael Anchia

State Rep. Rafael Anchia, a Democrat from Dallas, wrote the legislation this year, which passed as part of the state budget and became effective in September.

"Our community is rightfully concerned about the unusually high seismic activity in Dallas, Irving



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State Rep., D-Dallas

and Farmers Branch,” Anchia said in a statement. The “study should help us get to the bottom of it.”

Bringing industry, academia and the government together will ensure that different perspectives will be represented, said Scott Tinker, director of the Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas.

“At the end of the day, that’s where progress is made – with those different groups working

together and figuring out how to find compromises that will balance the objectives the different groups,” Tinker, also the state’s geologist, told Rigzone.

Tinker explained that the primary concern is whether the earthquakes are harming environmental systems.

Dr. Scott Tinker



Director, Bureau of Economic Geology

“You could argue they do at some level, but it’s not a big deal unless you start having earthquakes that cause damage to infrastructure, and that could be wellbores or pipelines or buildings or bridges,” he said. “If the earthquakes are large enough and in areas where those are located, then they can cause damage and that damage can have secondary damage on environmental systems.”

Earthquakes are measured on the Richter scale, which can begin at zero and move up or in a negative direction. It’s when the scale reaches a positive magnitude of 3 that they can be felt on the surface.

But it’s not the hydraulic fracturing on its own that’s in question, Tinker said. It’s actually the

disposal wells in which produced fluids are injected back into the ground that may be related to seismic events.

In 2013, the Texas Railroad Commission said there are about 35,000 active injection and disposal wells in the state. Of those, 7,500 are disposal wells.

“We’ve been disposing from oil and gas production for a century,” he said, adding, “The oil and gas business is really a water handling business. It handles a lot more water than oil or natural gas. You have to dispose that, and it’s all permitted and regulated, and there’s talk now about how best to do that.”



The industry wants to maintain its license to operate, and consumers want them to keep that license so that oil and natural gas is available to grow the economy. Making sound information available and transparent is also key, he said.

“That’s a mutual goal,” Tinker said, adding that, “If somebody feels the earth move, the

industry doesn’t want to be blamed.”

## FINDING A MIDDLE GROUND

The bureau is composed of an energy division, an environmental division and a center for energy economics. In total, about 250 people are working on the project, which will deploy 22 permanent seismometers across the state before the next legislative session at the beginning of 2017. Another 36 portable machines will be placed based in parts

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of the state that experience most seismic activity.



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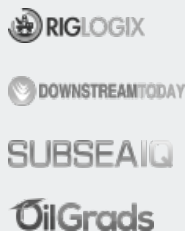
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