



New state-funded sensors are tracking earthquakes across Texas

A new interactive website from state-funded researchers is tracking tremors across Texas – part of an effort to understand the link between earthquakes and oil and gas production.

BY SHANNON NAJMABADI NOV. 24, 2017 12 AM

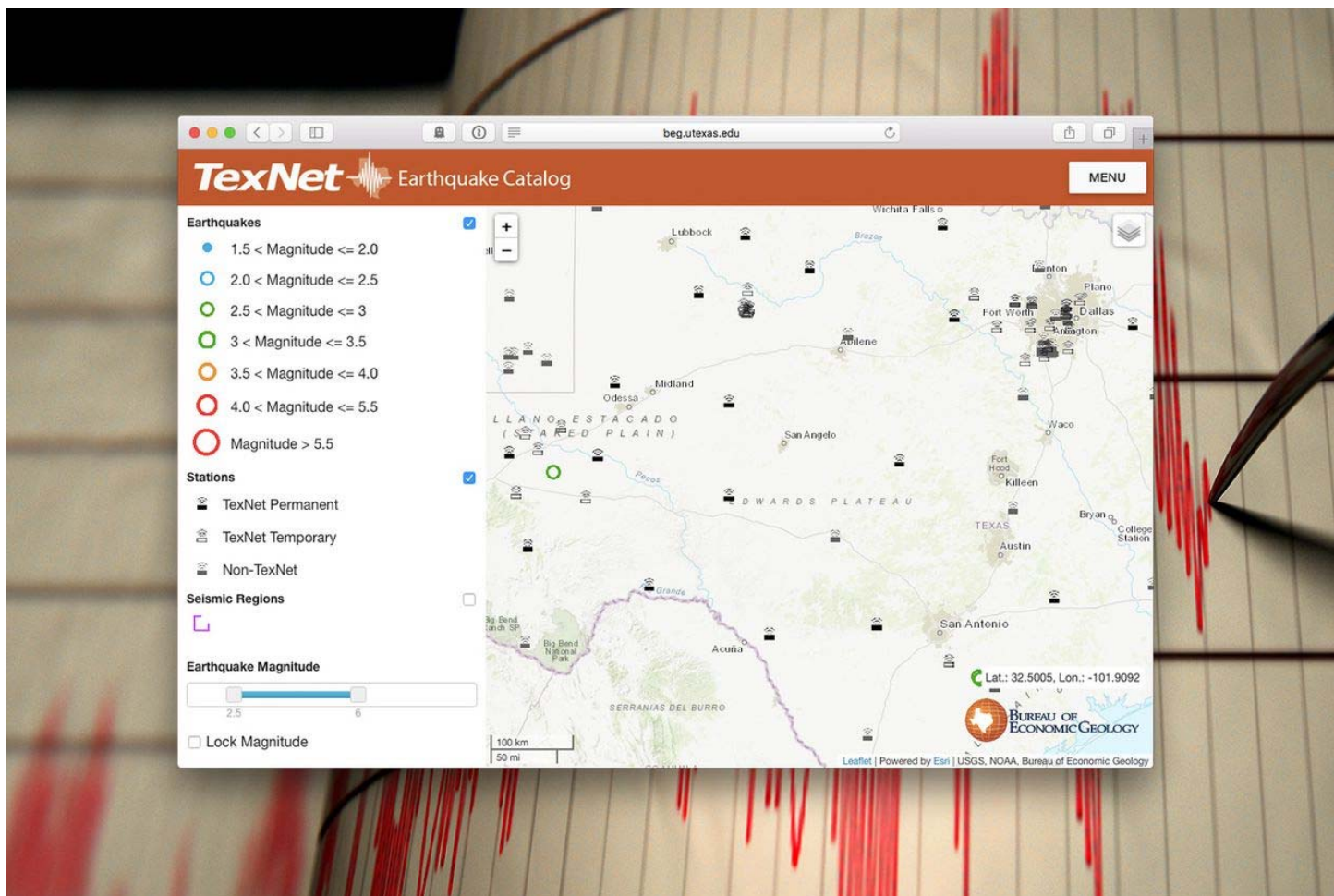


Illustration by Bureau of Economic Geology/UT Austin

Three years ago, a series of quakes rattled North Texas — and [some residents' nerves](#).

Larry Walden, a Parker County commissioner, remembers a public meeting at the time in which residents complained about cracked houses, damaged foundations and even a hen that had stopped laying eggs.

“They were minor earthquakes unless you're in an area affected by it,” Walden said. “Then it's not minor.”

So when a state-funded research team approached the county a year and a half ago about installing a sensor to track seismic activity on a piece of farmland, “we were more than happy,” Walden said. Local officials were eager for “some outside agency to ... hopefully give us some feedback as to what was going on.”

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That sensor, installed last year, is just one node in a statewide network called TexNet that monitors quakes and tremors across Texas. Run out of the University of Texas at Austin's [Bureau of Economic Geology](#), the program was created by the Legislature and Gov. [Greg Abbott](#) in 2015 after a [series](#) of temblors shook the Dallas-Fort Worth region.

Texas saw an uptick in quakes starting in [2008](#), and a growing body of research has linked fossil fuel activities – specifically the injection of oilfield wastewater into the ground – to the shaking. Industry representatives and state regulators have been [wary](#) of acknowledging a connection, arguing more detailed information is needed.

That's where the TexNet Seismic Monitoring program comes in. The goal is for the network of sensors, now collecting data across the state, to suss out the source of the tremors.

"You have a very complex issue, and a lot of people have tried to oversimplify it," said Steve Everley, a spokesman for the industry-funded group Texans for Natural Gas. "We need to get good data; we need to have good research. This is a program that obviously leads us toward that goal."

Peter Hennings, a research scientist with UT-Austin's Bureau of Economic Geology, said initial TexNet data shows "earthquakes happening in key areas in Texas that have really been known about for a few years" – mainly hubs of oil and gas production. As the program amasses more data, “we'll be able to start to look at the earthquake rate and ask the question ‘Is it increasing or decreasing in a given area?’” he said. “We're

