

☰ **ALL SECTIONS**



DALLAS NEWS
Powered by *The Dallas Morning News*

SUBSCRIBE
NOW



OPINION

EDITORIALS

COMMENTARY

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR





Railroad Commission still a nonbeliever on ties between North Texas earthquakes, injection disposal wells



Dallas Morning News Editorial

Don't miss a story. Like us on Facebook.

LIKE DALLAS NEWS

North Texas' seismic tremors aren't predictable, unlike the Texas Railroad Commission's response to earthquake swarms.

A study published recently in the journal [Science Advances](#) concludes that high-pressure wastewater injection disposal wells used to bury fluids from hydraulic fracturing activities revived dormant faults near Dallas. Like clockwork, the Railroad Commission insists again that this isn't a conclusive link between earthquake swarms and oil and gas activity.

[Wastewater injection reactivated dormant faults near Dallas, says new SMU earthquake study](#)

It's a sad and infuriating response in the face of compelling scientific evidence and

represents another example of the commission's failure to be the regulatory watchdog body that this state deserves. A [Dallas Morning News investigation last year](#) found that the Railroad Commission worked overtime to shield the oil and gas industry from accountability for earthquake activity across North Texas.

This agency, which remains too heavily focused on promoting the energy industry and beholden to industry campaign contributions, should assert its other role: industry regulator. With the Environmental Protection Agency under attack in Washington, the commission must not turn a blind eye to science and the risks to Texans. And that takes a level of independence and courage that we have not seen, especially in assessing the science behind earthquakes.

The latest research concludes that pressure and fluids from wastewater injections in Johnson and Tarrant counties probably migrated into Dallas and Irving along faults. Dallas and Irving sit above the deepest portion of the Fort Worth Basin, allowing fluid injected elsewhere in the basin to flow naturally toward the two cities. Using a technique similar to an ultrasound scan, researchers showed the faults in North Texas remained dormant until industry activity triggered them.

The commission says it "has long recognized the possibility of induced seismicity related to fluid injection," imposed limited restrictions on wastewater injection, shuttered a few wells and [sought more research](#). So what's so difficult about recognizing what the best available scientific research already knows?

[Railroad Commission's regulatory failings on earthquake research are stunning](#)

Until it officially acknowledges the link between earthquakes and the disposal wells, the commission will continue to sidestep its responsibility to develop a comprehensive wastewater disposal policy. Currently, gas prices are low. However, as the energy industry rebounds, the commission must be clear on how it plans to protect Texans.

That's not just environmental talk; smart regulations can shield the industry, too, from community backlash that in many places has stopped rigs from rolling into town.

[Abbott, lawmakers' support for real-time earthquake map pays off](#)

North Texas now ranks with some parts of California and Oklahoma for most damaging earthquakes, and with each study, the evidence of these being man-made due to injection well activity only increases. Finding a solution to the problem may be challenging, but the commission must accept the best available science and develop a strategy to balance industry interests with those of Texas residents.

What earthquake science shows and why it matters

"Their work is another piece of evidence that causes us to consider how and where we inject fluids in the subsurface." — Peter Hennings, who oversees a consortium of oil and gas companies that sponsor earthquake research at the University of Texas at Austin's Bureau of Economic Geology in support of the latest research

What's your view?

Got an opinion on this issue? [Send a letter to the editor](#), and you just might get published.



On Point.

A commentary newsletter

Get insightful commentary and analysis delivered straight to your inbox.

Email *

* = required field

Submit

[VIEW COMMENTS](#)

[EDITORIALS](#) [OPINION](#) [ENERGY](#) [TEXAS LEGISLATURE](#) [TEXAS](#)





Featured Content



**'The
Color
Purple,'
craft
beer and**

**other
fantastic
ways to
spend
the
weekend.**

5

OPINION

↻ LOADING...

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Careers](#)

[Special Sections](#)

[Terms of Service](#)

[Advertise](#)

[FAQ](#)

[Site Map](#)

©2018, The Dallas Morning News Inc. All Rights Reserved.