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Program gets underway to examine Texas earthquake increase

By - Associated Press - Monday, January 25, 2016

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) - A program to study the recent increase in earthquakes in Texas is getting underway with management hirings and the deployment of new seismographic equipment.

The TexNet Seismic Monitoring Program is being overseen by the University of Texas and bankrolled with \$4.5 million approved last year by the Texas Legislature.



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The Austin American-Statesman (<http://atxne.ws/1Qo8nil>) reports its review of U.S. Geological Survey records shows about two dozen quakes in Texas since 2011 reached at least 3.5 magnitude. In the previous five years - before the fracking boom - there were only five such quakes. The newspaper says one quake reached that magnitude between 2001 and 2005.

“Although there are always naysayers, the vast majority of scientists in the earthquake community would agree (that the uptick in quakes) is caused by human activity, mostly from wastewater injection wells associated with fracking or oil production,” one University of Texas seismologist, Cliff Frohlich, told the newspaper.

Texas lawmakers, long influenced by the state’s oil and gas industry, have been more skeptical, saying they want more information on geology and fault lines in the state, according to Rep. Drew Darby, R-San Angelo, chair of the House Energy Resources Committee.

The TexNet program will provide infrastructure and technical advice, he said.

A project manager has been hired along with a manager for the new Center for Integrated Seismicity Research at the University of Texas’ Bureau of Economic Geology, where data will be analyzed.

The state money also is being used to install 22 new permanent seismograph stations, more than double the current 16, and for 36 portable devices.

Sharon Wilson, Texas organizer for the environmental group Earthworks Oil and Gas Accountability Project, said the state “already has the research it needs” to further regulate oil and gas drilling.

“This will lead to another study to tell us what we already know,” she said.

But Frohlich said the new, more precise data will help inform decisions by the Texas Railroad Commission, which regulates oil and gas in the state.

An advisory committee yet to be named by Gov. Greg Abbott will include the state seismologist, two industry representatives, two academics and several others. The panel is to deliver by Dec. 1 a report to include an analysis of how the money was spent, the data collected by the equipment and address what will be needed to keep the program after this year.

Information from: Austin American-Statesman, <http://www.statesman.com>



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