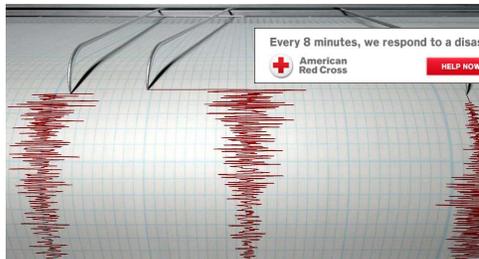




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## Johnson County at 'elevated' risk for earthquakes, official says



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Johnson County has "elevated risks" for earthquakes due to the disposal of fluids from deep injection wells, according to a statement released Tuesday by Texas Railroad Commissioner Ryan Sitton. ThinkStock - Star-Telegram archives

By Ryan Osborne  
[rosborne@star-telegram.com](mailto:rosborne@star-telegram.com)



Johnson County has "elevated risks" for earthquakes due to the disposal of fluids from deep injection wells, according to a statement released Tuesday by Texas Railroad Commissioner Ryan Sitton.

Sitton, though, said the situation with the wells in Johnson County is different than recent concerns about hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

Fracking injects water, sand and chemicals deep into rock formations to free oil and gas.

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"The science is clear that it is physically possible for injection wells that dispose of fluids deep underground to cause earthquakes in certain rare cases, given the right set of conditions," Sitton said. "Unfortunately, this often is confused with hydraulic fracturing, which can cause micro earthquakes that are almost never felt."

Sitton acknowledged "earlier academic reports" about a series of earthquakes in Azle. An SMU study last year linked oil and gas activities to the Azle earthquakes.

The research "could leave the impression that [earthquake risks] in the entire Dallas and Fort Worth area is caused by oil and gas," he said. "I don't believe that the science we have to date can support that conclusion."

In Johnson County, Sitton said he has seen "credible data and science from operators" that indicates a greater risk for earthquakes. His office will continue investigating the situation.

Johnson County was the only county named in Sitton's statement Tuesday.

He was announcing the launch of new research into "both naturally occurring and induced" earthquake risks in the state. The Bureau of Economic Geology, the Center for Integrated Seismicity Research and the newly formed Texas Seismometer Network will be participating in the research.

"I am working with those groups," Sitton said, "and if research points to a causal link between oil and gas and [earthquake risks] in the state, the Railroad Commission will address those situations in an appropriate way."

Ryan Osborne: 817-390-7684, @RyanOsborneFWST

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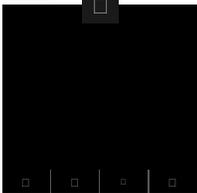
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