

BUSINESS

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# U.S. Geological Survey predicts fewer big earthquakes

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**FORT WORTH** —

The U.S. Geological Survey is forecasting fewer damaging earthquakes this year in the central and eastern United States, areas where in recent years there have been numerous tremors linked to wastewater disposal wells used in the hydraulic fracturing drilling process.

About 3.5 million people live and work in areas with significant potential for damaging quakes from induced seismicity in 2017, with the majority of this population in Oklahoma and southern Kansas. Including the possibility of natural earthquakes, the number of people at high risk rises to about 4 million.

The forecast is lower than last year, when it was estimated that 7 million people were at risk. This report is the second time the agency has forecast the likelihood of earthquakes. In north Texas and north Arkansas, there were no earthquakes larger than 2.7 magnitude in 2016. USGS considers a magnitude 2.7 earthquake to be the level at which ground shaking can be felt, according to the agency. An earthquake of 4.0 or more can cause minor or more significant damage.



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Mark Petersen, chief of the USGS National Seismic Hazard Mapping Project

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The agency said the decrease in earthquakes may be due to a drop in wastewater injection resulting from regulatory actions or a slowdown in oil and gas production due to lower prices. The one-year study was published Wednesday in [Seismological Research Letters](#).

“The good news is that the overall seismic hazard for this year is lower than in the 2016 forecast, but despite this decrease, there is still a significant likelihood for damaging ground shaking (in the region) in the year ahead,” according to Mark Petersen, chief of the USGS National Seismic Hazard Mapping Project, in a prepared statement.

Despite the decrease in the overall number of earthquakes in 2016, the USGS noted that Oklahoma experienced the largest earthquake ever recorded as well as the biggest number of large earthquakes compared to any prior year. The possibility of damage from induced earthquakes will continue to go up and down depending on government policy and industry decisions, Petersen said.

“The forecast for induced and natural earthquakes in 2017 is hundreds of times higher than before induced seismicity rates rapidly increased around 2008,” said Petersen. “Millions still face a significant chance of experiencing damaging earthquakes, and this could increase or decrease with industry practices, which are difficult to anticipate.”

The Texas Legislature two years ago approved [about \\$4.5 million for a comprehensive study after a rash of earthquakes hit North Texas](#). A Technical Advisory Committee to the Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas in Austin oversees the study, which includes \$2.47 million for the so-called TexNet system that will eventually place 22 permanent seismograph stations and 36 portable stations around the state to measure seismic activity. The remaining \$2 million goes to study the results.

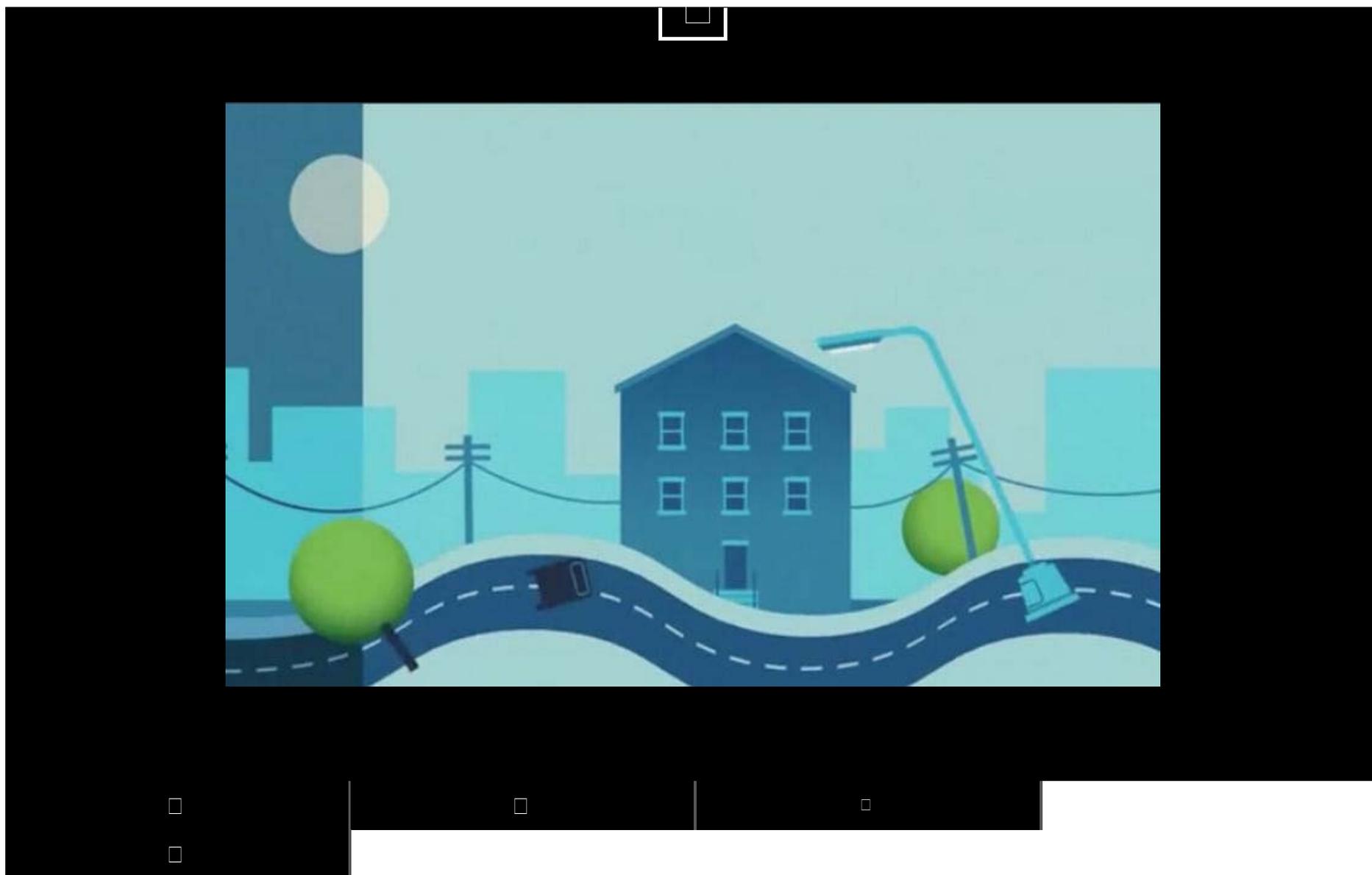
As of January, seven of the 22 permanent TexNet stations had been installed, the bureau reported. The agency said there are now 31 stations operating in the DFW area, including 13 portable TexNet stations and 18 that are monitored by Southern Methodist University.

Those monitors recorded 16 earthquakes of less than 1.5 in the Fort Worth Basin in January, two of which were associated with the Irving-Dallas sequence, and 14 near Venus in Johnson County, the bureau reported. A total of 28 earthquakes were recorded in Texas by TexNet, with the largest being a 2.7 magnitude near Pecos on Jan. 25.

Industry spokesman Steve Everley said the report shows, more than anything, that there “is a clear sign that the ongoing and collaborative work between scientists, the industry, and state regulators is reducing risks.”

“The scientific community has always emphasized that this is a manageable issue, and that the risk of induced seismicity is low. States have also been updating their regulations on wastewater injection in recent years, including here in Texas,” said Everley, a spokesman for Texans for Natural Gas.

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Video from FEMA



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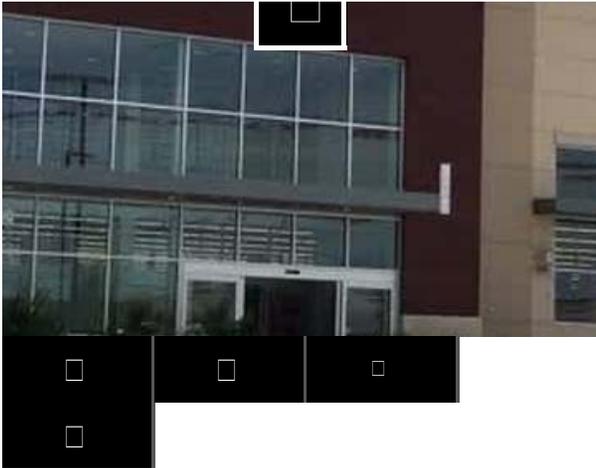
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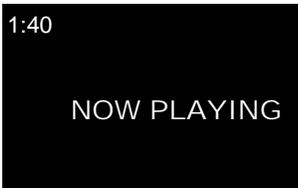
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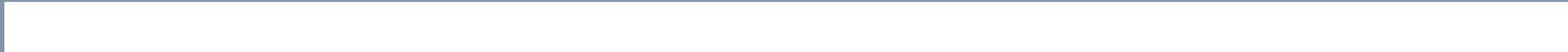
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