



BUSINESS

NOVEMBER 3, 2015

Railroad Commission says injection wells not linked to Azle earthquakes

HIGHLIGHTS

State hearing examiners found lack of evidence to link the wells to earthquakes

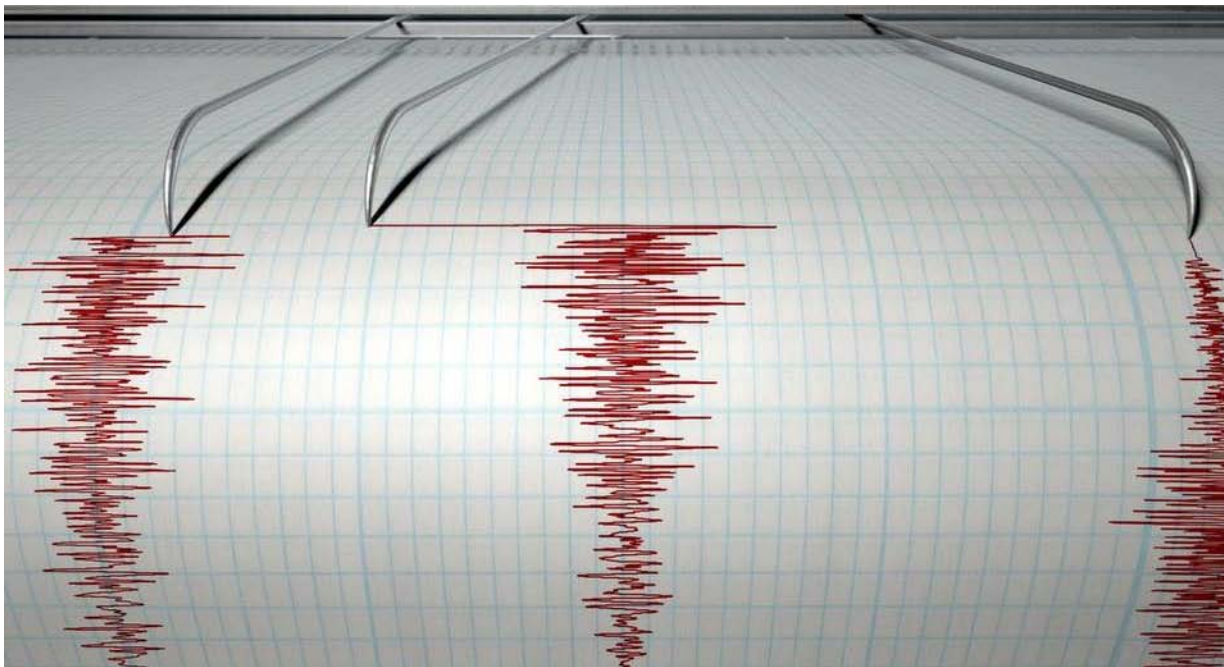
A study by SMU scientists linked the earthquakes near Fort Worth to oil and gas activity

Flurry of earthquakes convinced lawmakers to fund a broader study

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Injection wells near Reno and Azle were linked to earthquake activity. ThinkStock - Getty Images/iStockphoto

By Max B. Baker

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The Texas Railroad Commission agreed Tuesday that two wastewater injection wells northwest of Fort Worth did not cause a rash of earthquakes more than a year ago.

Commissioners unanimously agreed with hearing examiners that there was insufficient evidence to support findings that wells controlled by EnerVest Operating and XTO Energy near Reno and Azle contributed to seismic activity.

The commissioners agreed with the examiners that EnerVest and XTO should be able to maintain their permits for the wells.



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Michael Grizzle of Springtown stands at the door to greet attendants of the second public meeting in 2014 in Azle, Texas to discuss earthquakes. Ron T. Ennis - Star-Telegram archives

STATE EXAMINERS FOUND THAT SCIENTIFIC DATA INDICATED A “WEAK” TEMPORAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THE INJECTING WELLS AND SEISMIC ACTIVITIES

Earlier this year, the hearing examiners discounted a study released in the spring by Southern Methodist University researchers that linked the oil and gas process to the flurry of earthquakes that hit the Azle and Reno area from November 2013 to January 2014.

The SMU study “is a commendable first-order investigation” but it “presents data indicating a weak temporal correlation between injection and seismic activities — too small, however, to imply a causal relationship without further corroborating evidence,” the examiners wrote.

Craig Pearson, the state’s seismologist, had said earlier that he didn’t see any “substantial proof” that the temblors northwest of Fort Worth were linked to oil and gas activity.

Still, the rash of earthquakes near Reno and Azle have contributed to interest across the state to determine what may be causing the ground to shake in North Texas and elsewhere.

Researchers from the University of Texas at Austin’s Bureau of Economic Geology have been working on a \$4.5 million comprehensive earthquake study approved by Texas lawmakers this year. The TexNet system will include 22 permanent seismograph stations and 36 portable stations.

Lawmakers approved money for the study after a rash of earthquakes plagued North Texas residents in recent years, the largest one a 4.0-magnitude temblor near Venus and Mansfield in May.

Scientists don’t necessarily believe earthquakes in Irving and West Dallas are being caused by drilling. There were 97 earthquakes from January 2013 to October 2015 in an area stretching from Reno to Dallas Love Field and from Alliance Airport to Interstate 30, the U.S. Geological Survey reported. The earthquakes were 1.6 to 3.6 in magnitude.

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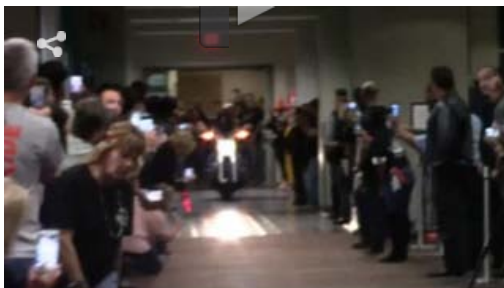


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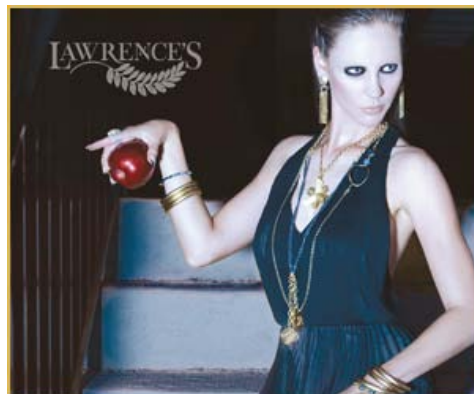
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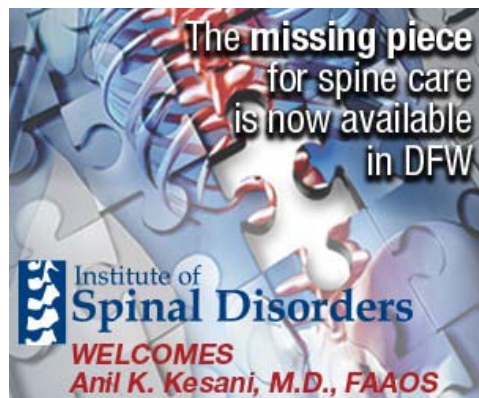
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