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DESPITE EXPERT REASSURANCE, PECOS RESIDENTS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT EARTHQUAKES

There have been 650 earthquakes in and around Pecos since the beginning of 2017.



[Texas Standard](#)

Despite Expert Reassurance, Pecos Residents Are Con...

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By Bayla Metzger | December 6, 2017 9:30 am



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Bayla Metzger/Marfa Public Radio

Science teacher Joel Chavez stands in front of a TexNet earthquake monitor at Crockett Middle School in Pecos, Texas.

From [Marfa Public Radio](#):

Earthquakes have been on the rise in Texas for almost a decade. [A lot of scientific research links these tremors](#) to oil and gas activity, specifically to injection wells where frack wastewater is disposed of deep below the earth's surface. In Pecos, an oil-rich town in the Permian Basin, residents have been experiencing a lot of earthquakes lately.

Joel Chavez, a middle school science teacher, experienced his first earthquake last December. He says he was lying in his bed reading at

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around 1:30 a.m. when it hit.

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[Pecos City Council](#) about setting up an interactive map where residents could self-report the earthquakes they felt, but the council opted not to help.

Chavez got in touch with [University of Texas-Austin's Bureau of Economic Geology](#), which had just launched TexNet, a statewide earthquake monitoring system. The response was rapid. He says they had a seismometer installed within a week. It was even placed behind Crockett Middle School, where Chavez teaches. You can find it there today, between the tennis courts and the football field.

Now data from that TexNet earthquake monitor and others in the area are revealing that earthquakes are happening almost every day in and around Pecos. TexNet has recorded about 650 earthquakes around Pecos since the start of 2017, according to [Peter Hennings](#), the Geology Lead at the Center for Integrated Seismicity Research, which runs TexNet. That's more than 30 times the number of earthquakes reported in the area over the last decade [by the USGS](#).

According to Hennings, geologists have long known that the Pecos area could be particularly susceptible to seismic activity. There are a few reasons for this: First, it's riddled with ancient, dormant faults, which [can be re-activated by wastewater injection](#). Second, the town of Pecos sits in the Pecos river valley, which has loose,

sandy soil. Adding to this already precarious ecosystem is a petroleum boom and demand

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"While the number is high, the earthquakes are tiny," he says. However, the tremors don't feel so tiny to local residents. Since science teacher Joel Chavez helped bring the TexNet earthquake monitor to Pecos, local residents have been coming to with their concerns. "A lot of residents have asked me, like, at point blank, like, should I leave, should I take my children? Where should I go...?," he says.

Lisa Lara, a librarian at the middle school, says she's been feeling earthquakes two to three times a week. A couple of weeks ago, she experienced an earthquake so severe that it caused a crack on the side of her house. "It is very scary," she says. "We're afraid that our house is going to fall one of these days or something."

While it may not be easy to sit tight when your home is shaking, Pecos-area residents may not have a choice. Before UT's TexNet researchers can figure out how to stop the quakes, they'll need more data. And that could take between a year and 18 months.

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