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Setting the record straight about the Railroad Commission of Texas



Wayne Christian, Contributor

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Seemingly every six months, *The Dallas Morning News* publishes an editorial inaccurately criticizing the job performance of the Railroad Commission of Texas in protecting the environment for the citizens of Texas. The latest fake-news piece accuses the Railroad Commission of turning a "blind eye to science" by not doing enough to protect the public from earthquakes.

The fact is, the commission is a government agency full of scientists who take the issue of induced seismicity very seriously. As a result, the commission has in place some of the most stringent rules on disposal wells — the type of wells some link to earthquakes — in the country. Like all issues before the commission, our scientists take immense pride in ensuring all our decisions to protect the public and the environment are based on sound science, not irresponsible, politically driven narratives.

Texas is quickly becoming a leader in seismicity research. In 2015, the Texas

Legislature appropriated more than \$4 million to fund an enhanced seismic network managed by the Bureau of Economic Geology called TexNet. As part of the TexNet program, seismometers have been placed across Texas. Scientists from the Bureau of Economic Geology, the University of Texas, Southern Methodist University, Texas A&M, the Railroad Commission and industry are collaborating on research projects to gain a better understanding of seismicity in Texas. Fortunately, the TexNet program and the commission's rules are working. In fact, in October the Environmental Protection Agency released a report that "highly commends the RRC for its actions to address" seismicity in Texas, "including implementation of changes in permitting and operation requirements."

This is not the first time the commission has been applauded by the EPA for how Texas handles issues of seismicity. In August 2016, the EPA stated in a report that the "RRC is also commended for establishing new regulations specific to seismicity, including solidifying RRC authority to take appropriate action related to injection well operations."

Additionally, the RRC is a leader in protecting Texas' underground sources of drinking water. Our agency just completed an exhaustive review of nearly 63,000 injection-well applications since 1982. The findings of the review confirm RRC-permitted injection wells are not polluting any sources of underground drinking water or potential sources of underground drinking water in our state.

As it did with regard to seismicity, the EPA commended the commission's Underground Injection Control program in its fiscal year 2016 end-of-year evaluation, stating the commission had "more than adequate inspection and monitoring" of Class II injection wells (wells used in oil and gas activities) and that our testing and surveillance program "exceeds the minimum performance measure."

While the Railroad Commission is clearly doing its job of protecting the public, environmental extremists have engaged in fake news campaigns to twist these facts as

part of their proxy war against fossil fuels. The RRC has been diligent about distributing information regarding these issues, but for the most part studies with good news, such as the recent EPA reports, have been largely ignored by the mainstream media.

If you would like more information, our agency did an in-depth breakdown on the reports and reviews mentioned in this editorial at the commission's last open meeting. You can watch that here: http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/rrc/open_meeting/20171205/

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