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RRC investigation underway on cause of 5.1 earthquake in Martin County

BY TREVOR HAWES, MIDLAND REPORTER-TELEGRAM, TEXAS *THE TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY*

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The Railroad Commission is investigating whether a large earthquake that shook West Texas Monday night was caused by produced water disposal wells.

"The RRC has been in contact with operators and sent inspectors to the area as part of our efforts to reduce seismicity possibly caused by underground injection of produced water into disposal wells. (Produced water is water that comes out from wells during oil and gas production.)," the state oil and gas regulator told the Reporter-Telegram in a statement Tuesday. "The RRC will then evaluate next steps that could potentially be taken to mitigate earthquakes to protect residents."

The TexNet Seismic Monitoring Program, which reports data to the U.S. Geological Survey, said in a news release that Monday's 5.1-magnitude temblor happened at 7:50 p.m. about 30 miles north of Midland in Martin County. The process of better understanding the earthquake continues.

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"We are still investigating the data associated with this seismic event," said Mark Shuster, Interim Director of the Bureau of Economic Geology, which manages TexNet. "Our first concern, of course, is for any people who might have been affected by this earthquake."

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This is the second earthquake at or above a 5.0 magnitude in West Texas this year, and it's the sixth since 2020. On July 26, a 5.1-magnitude quake rattled the

state on the Scurry-Fisher county line. Three days later, the RRC shut in two disposal wells.

As of 4 p.m. Tuesday, USGS had recorded 19 earthquakes of all magnitudes in the immediate area of Monday's event over the past 24 hours, three of which were at 2.0 or above. None reached 3.0 or above. Twenty-eight earthquakes have been recorded in this area over the past seven days.

The city of Midland, Midland County and Midland ISD did not report any damage to its properties. Commenters on the Reporter-Telegram's Facebook page reported sloshing water in pools, cracked concrete in driveways and being shaken awake in bed.

People across Texas reported feeling Monday's earthquake, and according to information submitted to USGS, it was felt as far away as Iron River, Michigan, about 1,190 miles away.

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