

News

Geological Survey's OU affiliation not enough to avoid budget cuts

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OKLAHOMA CITY - The Oklahoma Geological Survey's hybrid status as both a state agency and a division within a university won't save it from a possible budget cut.

Gov. Mary Fallin's Oct. 26 executive order asked agencies to divide budget items into those they consider essential and nonessential to the mission of each agency. She asked officials to come up with a plan to cut 10 percent of non-critical expenses. She also placed a moratorium on out-of-state travel that isn't required to maintain professional accreditation.

Oklahoma's earthquake research office will be subject to the same cuts as other agencies, said press secretary Michael McNutt.

The Oklahoma Geological Survey is a state agency that provides earthquake location data to the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. But OGS is also a part of the University of Oklahoma and is housed within the Sarkeys Energy Center on campus. The survey conducts research on the state's seismic activity, catalogs natural and mineral resources needed for geology maps and examines underground aquifers. Although the state's universities are not subject to the governor's executive order, the Oklahoma Geological Survey's affiliation with OU won't save it from the required belt-tightening.

The Sooner State has experienced an unnatural, dramatic rise in temblors since 2012. Research released in May tied recent earthquakes in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Ohio and Arkansas to oil and gas wastewater disposal activity.

[Read more coverage on earthquakes in Oklahoma.](#)

Texas' Legislature appropriated \$4.5 million for its Bureau of Economic Geology to purchase seismic monitoring equipment and conduct research on the state's rock layers.

The Kansas Corporation Commission provided about \$85,000 from its oil and gas conservation fees to fund a temporary seismic network the Kansas Geological Survey operates. The Kansas Legislature provided \$160,000 for KGS to install a permanent seismic monitoring network.

McNutt said Texas has a much larger budget than Oklahoma, and the Sooner State is proportionately closer to Kansas.

Oklahoma Secretary of Energy and Environment Michael Teague dedicated about \$200,000 to OGS for equipment and research projects related to earthquake studies, but the money has not been transferred yet.

McNutt said agencies must be proactive in defining essential budget items for the 2017 fiscal year, which begins July 1, 2016. If an agency can separate nonessential spending, core services won't have to be cut when the budget process advances, he said.

"If they don't have 10 percent to cut and they are bare-bones, they say that," McNutt said. "We want the agencies to go through that process if they haven't already."

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