

State officials to study quakes



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Two national groups based in Oklahoma City are building a multistate coalition to look into the possible connection between earthquakes and injection wells used by the oil and natural gas industry.

Regulators and geological surveys from Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Arkansas and Ohio gathered in Oklahoma City for part of two days last month to share expertise and studies related to their unexplained increase in seismic activity, said Gerry Baker, associate executive director of the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission.

The commission organized the coalition with the Ground Water Protection Council.

Baker said geology varies across the country, but officials still have plenty of research and experience to share, especially since representatives from Pennsylvania, Illinois, West Virginia, Colorado and California have joined the conversation on induced seismicity.

"It's a good knowledge base," he said. "Hopefully we'll be able to learn from each other rather than having to reinvent the wheel."

2013 sets record

Oklahoma has experienced a rising number of earthquakes, with 2013 bringing more quakes than any other year in recorded state history.

Studies by the Oklahoma Geological Survey, U.S. Geological Survey and others are ongoing, without any consensus.

One report co-authored

by a former University of Oklahoma professor connected the state-record 5.7 magnitude quake in 2011 to an injection well near Luther, but the Oklahoma Geological Survey has said the incident appears "consistent with a natural earthquake."

Geologists in Ohio this month concluded that hydraulic fracturing may have contributed to a series of earthquakes near a small, unknown fault there, but most studies have focused on the impact of injection wells.

'Ongoing exchange'

There are more than 150,000 injection wells around the country used by the oil and gas industry to dispose of produced water or enhance resource recovery, according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency data.

Baker said the industry has cooperated with the earthquake studies, contributing its data and expertise to the discussion.

"It's going to be an ongoing exchange," he said. "This is a collective that can really do some good things."

The Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association has established a working group to help establish guidelines for disposal well placement and data collection.