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Study links Texas quakes to fracking

By Seth Borenstein

With real-time monitors, scientists have linked a swarm of small earthquakes west of Fort Worth, Texas, to nearby natural gas wells and wastewater injection.

In 84 days from November 2013 to January 2014, the area around Azle, Texas, shook with 27 magnitude 2 or greater earthquakes, while scientists at Southern Methodist University and the U.S. Geological Survey monitored the shaking. It's an area that had no recorded quakes for 150 years on faults that "have been inactive for hundreds of millions of years," said SMU geophysicist Matthew Hornbach.

When the volume of injections decreased significantly, so did the shaking.

The scientists concluded that removing salt-water from the wells in the gas production process and then injecting that wastewater back underground "represent the most likely cause" for the swarm of quakes, according to a study published Tuesday in the journal *Nature Communications*.

The scientists determined this based on where and when the earthquakes happened; computer models that track pressure changes; and company data from nearby wells. Hornbach said the timing and location of the quakes correlates better to the drilling and injection than any other



possible reason.

"There appears to be little doubt about the conclusion that the earthquakes were in fact induced," USGS seismologist Susan Hough, who wasn't part of the study team, said in an email. "There's almost an abundance of smoking guns in this case."

This adds to other studies that linked injecting wastewater from energy wells to a tremendous jump in earthquakes in Oklahoma and southern

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Kansas, where there have been more than 950 magnitude 2 or higher quakes so far this year, according to the USGS.

On Tuesday, the Oklahoma Geological Society said it is "very likely" that most of the earthquakes that have shaken the state in recent years

Removing saltwater from the wells in the gas production process and injecting wastewater back underground represents the most likely cause of the swarm of quakes.

have been triggered by the subsurface injection of wastewater from oil and natural gas drilling operations. The society released a statement following an investigation into dozens of earthquakes recorded in central and north-central Oklahoma.

Unlike other research that linked quakes to the injection of wastewater, the SMU study also sees a secondary link in another part of the drilling process, when massive amounts of brine is taking out of the ground with the gas, said study co-author William Ellsworth of the USGS. Removing the saltwater changes the underground pressure, Hornbach said.

But the deep injection of the wastes still is the principle culprit, Ellsworth said. The controversial method of hydraulic fracturing or fracking, even though that may be used in the drilling, is not physically causing the shakes, he said.

The findings come amid heightened debate over oil and gas regulations, including efforts in some communities to ban drilling. In Texas, lawmakers are considering bills that would limit cities' abilities to do so.

The Texas Railroad Commission, the state's

oil and gas regulator, hired its first seismologist last year to investigate potential links between quakes and fracking after Azle residents asked the agency to halt oil and gas activities. The seismologist has not offered any conclusions.

Meanwhile, SMU seismologists are still examining the cause of ongoing earthquakes in suburban Dallas. In February, researchers released preliminary results that showed a narrow fault line extending from Irving to West Texas. Researchers previously identified disposal wells as the source of seismic activity at the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.



Seth Borenstein writes for the Associated Press.

Los Angeles city workers demand good-faith bargaining

By David Trujillo

Matthew, a sanitation worker, arrives at his yard at 4:30 a. m. He has some coffee, jumps into his truck and drives off the yard to begin his route. He has worked 15 years with the city of Los Angeles

Matthew is just one of 10,000 L.A. city workers including clerical, traffic officers and others, represented by the Service Employee International Union (SEIU), Local 721 who have, over the past nine months, been working without a contract.

Local 721 has been asking the city to make good-faith proposals for a new contract. The union wants to protect pensions, keep healthcare costs for workers down, and improve wages and working conditions. The city has thus far refused to negotiate seriously.

The union and the city have been in piecemeal contract negotiations for months with the city offering limited concrete proposals. The city workers declared that they won't back down when it comes to negotiating a fair and decent contract.

The City of L.A. has been placed on notice that a possible strike may be necessary in the near future if negotiations continued to be stalled. Pressure has been placed on the city when the union's bargaining team recommended a "yes" vote on strike authorization. The workers authorized a strike with an 86 percent "yes" vote.

In recent days, sanitation workers expressed their frustration with the slow pace of negotiations by participating in various actions with other city workers. Matthew took the day off to participate. He said that he would strike if necessary.

The director of the L.A. City Bureau of Sanitation has said he will hire contractors as replacement workers if there is strike. Los Angeles city officials have complained that some actions by the city workers are disrupting city services.

City workers have made it known that they will not accept the city hiring replacement workers or 'scabs' as they are called. The union position is that workers should not be blamed for inaction by the city.

The solution is for the city to come to the bargaining table with realistic and commonsense proposals.

Rapid rise in super PACs dominated by single donors

By Pro Publica

A growing number of political committees known as super PACs have become instruments of single donors, according to a ProPublica analysis of federal records. During the 2014 election cycle, \$113 million - 16 percent of money raised by all super PACs - went to committees dominated by one donor. That was quadruple their 2012 share.

The rise of single-donor groups is a new example of how changes in campaign finance law are giving outsized influence to a handful of funders.

The trend may continue into 2016. Last week, National Review reported that Texas Senator Ted Cruz's bid for the Republican presidential nomination would be boosted not by one anointed super PAC but four, each controlled by a single donor or donor family.

The Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United ruling helped usher in the era of super PACs. Unlike traditional political action committees, the independent groups can accept donations of any dollar size as long as they don't coordinate with the campaign of any candidate. Previously, much of the focus in big-money fundraising was on "bundlers" -- volunteers who tap friends and associates for maximum individual contributions of \$5,400 to a candidate, then deliver big lump sums directly to the campaigns. Former president George W. Bush awarded his most



prolific bundlers special titles such as "Ranger" and "Pioneer."

While bundling intensified the impact of wealthy donors on campaigns, the dollar limits and the need to join with others diluted the influence of any one person. With a super PAC, a donor can single-handedly push a narrower agenda. Last year, National Journal profiled one such donor - a California vineyard owner who helped start the trend by launching his own super PAC and becoming a power player in a Senate race across the country.

Beyond the single-donor groups, big donations are dominant across all kinds of super PACs, according to the analysis. Six-figure contributions from individuals or organizations accounted for almost 50 percent of all super PAC money raised during the last two cycles.

ProPublica's analysis identified 59 super PACs that received at least 80 percent of their funding from one individual during the 2014 cycle. Donors who launch their own PACs are seeking more control over how their money is spent. And many have complained about the commissions that fundraising consultants take off the top of their donations to outside groups. But the move carries risks if the patron is new to the arena.

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UN to EU: Take bold steps to rescue refugees

By Morning Star

Senior United Nations officials took the unusual step of urging European Union leaders to take “bold collective action” to save refugees’ lives in the Mediterranean.

UN high commissioner for refugees Antonio Guterres, the UN secretary-general’s special representative Peter Sutherland, UN high commissioner for human rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein and International Organization for Migration director-general William L Swing united in their call to EU politicians.

The UN officials requested that EU states create sufficient channels for safe and regular migration, including for low-skilled migrant workers and family reunifications, so that desperate people do not depend on people-smugglers.

They also urged “a firm commitment to receive significantly higher numbers of refugees through EU-wide resettlement combined with other legal means for refugees to reach safety.” However, early signs indicated that their pleas had fallen on deaf ears.

The EU leaders were planning to double financial sources to save lives in the Mediterranean, but this would not even match the original Operation Mare Nostrum exercise that was axed.

A draft statement under discussion said that the 28 nations would “increase search and rescue possibilities.”

However, EU foreign policy head Federica Mogherini revived memories of “humanitarian bombing” by saying the bloc would immediately start preparing an operation likely to have a military component.

“We will take action now for the funeral of 24 migrants who died at sea.”

Represión a mineros Mexicanos

TeleSur

De acuerdo a un sindicato y una organización no gubernamental, el Gobierno canadiense fue cómplice a través de su embajada en México en la represión contra trabajadores mineros de ese país latinoamericano.

Dos organizaciones denunciaron que el Gobierno de Canadá colaboró directamente con la compañía minera Excellon, en la represión de protestas pacíficas que llevaron a cabo trabajadores mineros y pobladores de la localidad de Ejido La Sierrita, ubicada en el estado mexicano de Durango, al noroeste de ese país.

De acuerdo al informe “Las entrañas de la complicidad canadiense: Excellon Resources, la Embajada de Canadá y la violación de los derechos laborales y a la tierra en Durango, México”, elaborado por el sindicato canadiense United Steelworkers y la organización no gubernamental MiningWatch Canada -y divulgado este martes- se revela que los “diplomáticos canadienses en México fueron cómplices” en acciones de Excellon, como la violación de contratos, malas condiciones laborales y represión.

Luego de revisar 250 páginas de documentos oficiales de la Cancillería y el Ministerio de Comercio de Canadá, ambas organizaciones afirmaron en el informe que los diplomáticos canadienses en México “planearon compartir información con Excellon, recogida de los miembros de la comunidad sin su consentimiento”.

United Steelworkers y Mining Watch Canada agregaron que los diplomáticos “ayudaron a la compañía a forjar conexiones de alto nivel que condujeron a la violenta represión contra

las protestas”, en la que presionaron al Ejecutivo mexicano para que utilizara a la Policía y el Ejército contra los manifestantes.

El director nacional de United Steelworkers, Ken Neumann, emitió un comunicado donde expresó que los documentos indican que el Gobierno de Canadá en ningún momento profesó “su política declarada de fomentar que las compañías mineras canadienses actúen de forma responsable y respeten los estándares internacionales”. “El apoyo de la embajada canadiense a Excellon es un crudo ejemplo de la promoción del Gobierno canadiense de los intereses corporativos a costa de trabajadores y comunidades”, añadió Neumann. Por su parte, el coordinador para Latinoamérica de MiningWatch, Jen Moore, declaró que “este informe confirma nuestros temores de que la política del Gobierno canadiense de utilizar su cuerpo diplomático para servir intereses privados en el exterior está destinada a contribuir a aumentar el daño”.

El informe, de acuerdo a las organizaciones, también muestra que el Gobierno del primer ministro Stephen Harper ha colaborado con una empresa minera en México, Blackfire, también acusada de violaciones en el estado mexicano de Chiapas.

En Contexto

El conflicto entre los trabajadores mineros mexicanos y Excellon estalló a mediados de 2012, cuando miembros de la comunidad Ejido La Sierrita iniciaron una protesta contra la compañía minera, a la que acusaban de continuas violaciones de contrato en la mina La Platosa.

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