

## Earthquakes in Ohio Linked to Deep Well Injection of Fracking Wastewater

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The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has announced an agreement with the operator of a wastewater disposal well located in Youngstown, Ohio to shut down one active well, and, as a precautionary measure, delay the start-up of four proposed wells, following a 4.0 magnitude earthquake that hit the area on New Year's Eve. The December 31st earthquake followed a number of low-level seismic events earlier in 2011, and was reportedly felt as far away as New York and Toronto, Canada. While the ODNR has not yet issued any formal statement, a Columbia University seismologist who has been monitoring the earthquakes at ODNR's request has already concluded that the high pressure injection of wastewater into the disposal well is likely the cause of the earthquakes.

The ODNR's action comes amidst increasing public awareness about potential links between fracking operations and earthquakes. The disposal wells suspected of causing the Ohio earthquakes are not fracking wells, but were used for the disposal of fracking wastewater. However, industry representatives have pointed out that there are 177 deep well injection sites in Ohio, and such wells have been used safely and reliably for wastewater disposal for decades. In the event that earthquake activity near wastewater disposal wells continues, the use of such wells for the disposal of fracking wastewater will no doubt be re-examined. Shale gas exploration requires huge volumes of water to be injected into fracking wells, most of which returns to the surface as flowback. With at least one state agency already making a tentative connection between wastewater disposal wells and earthquake activity, methods of disposing of wastewater generated by fracking operations will remain a pressing concern.

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