

Geologists eye new well after 7 quakes in NE Ohio

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YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio -- Geologists are checking for possible links between a brine-water injection well and seven minor earthquakes since March in the Youngstown area of northeast Ohio.

The quakes are the only ones recorded with epicenters in Youngstown and the Mahoning River valley.

According to The (Youngstown) Vindicator, experts are checking the 18-month-old injection well completed in Youngstown 10 months before the quakes began. Of the seven earthquakes, six had epicenters near the well.

Brine water, a byproduct of oil drilling and hydraulic-fracturing for natural gas, is flushed underground.

"There's definitely a coincidence," said Jeffrey Dick, geology department chairman at Youngstown State University. "But whether or not there's a link, nobody has enough data quite yet."

Heidi Hetzel-Evans, a spokeswoman for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, said the agency stood by regulations allowing the well operations. The agency has "not seen any evidence that shows a correlation between localized seismic activity and deep-injection well disposal," she said.

D&L Energy Inc., an oil and gas exploration company that operates the well, believes there's no data linking the well to earthquakes, said Nick Paparodis, the company's vice president of land operations.

Wastewater from Pennsylvania drilling makes up most business for the Youngstown well. Some wells, including the one in Youngstown, go 9,000 feet below the surface.

The Youngstown site has had a daily injection average of 2,000 barrels, or 84,000 gallons, of wastewater. D&L also is establishing at least two other injection wells in the Youngstown area.