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May 18, 2016

TIPRO Statement on New Seismicity Study

Austin, Texas – This week, a study published by faculty at the University of Texas and Southern Methodist University reports that earthquakes caused by human activity have been occurring in Texas since the 1920s. The study claims a connection between seismic events in the state and the oil and natural gas sector, and recommends a five-question “test” for ascertaining whether a seismic event is natural or manmade.

“This latest report ignores several important factors and presents subjective assertions regarding a connection between oil and natural gas development and seismic activity. For instance, none of the questions focus on subsurface pressures or fluid movements, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), academics and numerous state regulatory agencies have all recommended as key elements of determining whether a particular event is induced or not. The report also almost entirely ignores current efforts underway to provide more concrete data on seismic activity in the state,” said Ed Longanecker, president of TIPRO.

In 2014, the Texas Railroad Commission made revisions to Statewide Rules 3.9 and 3.46, establishing some of the most stringent regulations in the nation on seismicity. The updated rules require operators to collect disposal well volumes and pressures in addition to historic data on seismic events in proximity to a disposal well, among other new requirements. The changes also affirm the commission’s authority to modify, suspend, or terminate a permit for saltwater or other oil and gas waste disposal for just cause.

Additionally, during the 84th Texas Legislative Session, several state legislators worked to move forward additional appropriations on seismic research. Through passage of House Bill 2 in 2015, \$4.47 million was appropriated out of general revenue to the University of Texas at Austin’s Bureau of Economic Geology for TexNet, a program responsible for the purchase and deployment of seismic equipment, maintenance of seismic networks, modeling of reservoir behavior for systems of wells in the vicinity of faults, and the establishment of a technical advisory committee. On March 24, 2016, Texas Governor Greg Abbott announced the members of the newly formed technical advisory committee for statewide seismic monitoring.

“The report seeks to preempt proactive research efforts currently underway designed to identify the true cause of seismic events in the state of Texas. While the report makes reference to some of these initiatives, the data presented is premature, deficient in making a definitive connection to oil and natural gas activities, and unnecessary given the amount of focus, structure and funding allocated to this issue. TIPRO supports continued collaboration, research and analysis pertaining to earthquake mitigation, risk assessment, and related regulations,” said Longanecker.

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About TIPRO

The Texas Independent Producers & Royalty Owners Association (TIPRO) is a trade association representing the interests of over 3,000 independent oil and natural gas producers and royalty owners throughout Texas. As one of the nation’s largest statewide associations representing both independent producers and royalty owners, members include small businesses, the largest, publicly-traded independent producers, and mineral owners, estates, and trusts. Members of TIPRO are responsible for producing more than 85 percent of the natural gas and 70 percent of the oil within Texas, and own mineral interests in millions of acres across the state.