

No public hearing on proposed seismic testing

County judge, Dickinson administrator ask Corps of Engineers for meetings on survey



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By **WHITNEY HODGIN**

The Daily News

Despite requests from local leaders and Galveston County residents for a public hearing about seismic surveys, neither the

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or Samson Exploration agreed to play host to one before the end of the public comment period Wednesday.

About 50,000 residents received a public notice

in the mail from the corps last month because the 731-square-mile testing area includes Santa Fe, Hitchcock, La Marque and parts of Texas City and

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Galveston Island and could also include wetlands.

County Judge Mark Henry and Dickinson City Administrator Julie Johnston asked the corps to conduct public hearings about the 3-D seismic survey, which uses shock waves to detect underground formations.

In this case, the shock waves would be caused by exploding 11-pound dynamite charges in 110-foot holes drilled at intervals of 220 feet. The holes would be drilled, detonated and filled in increments.

Some area residents were concerned the survey was related to hydraulic fracturing, a method of obtaining natural gas from shale rock deposits. Critics of the practice, also known as fracking, have said that it can contaminate air and water supplies and endanger lives.

It is with that in mind that Johnston

wrote a letter Monday to Corps Regulations Manager Natalie Rund, the only person authorized to require Samson organize a public hearing.

Dickinson homeowners plan to oppose future testing because water and sewer infrastructure in the city was damaged by a seismic survey in the early 2000s, according to the letter.

"The city of Dickinson and Galveston County Water Control and Improvement District No. 1 have undertaken millions of dollars in infrastructure improvements over the last six years," it read. "Additionally, there are numerous wetlands within the Dickinson City limits and along Dickinson Bayou that

must be protected."

Homeowners associations for subdivisions inside Dickinson have notified the city of their intent to enforce deed restrictions to prevent Samson from conducting the survey, according to the letter.

Samson understands it must adhere to local ordinances and can't conduct the survey on private property without permission, said Steven Trujillo, regulatory manager and spokesperson for the Oklahoma-based oil company.

The natural resource permit from the corps is one of several permits Samson must obtain before it can start the testing, which will likely be more than a year from now, Trujillo said.

"Samson is looking for deeper formations and sediments," he said. "The technology is not very intrusive in the environment. We are seeking natural resource permits and mineral rights from mineral owners in the area to collect mineral data."

Fracking has nothing to do with this particular survey because the company is not looking for shale, he said.

"In this area, we should not have to frack," Trujillo said. "That's not our intention. But I can't say 100 percent we'll never frack."

The issue is a discussion item at today's commissioners court meeting. Trujillo is scheduled to give a presentation on the survey at the commissioner's court meeting on March 5.

Both the La Marque and Galveston city councils also plan to address the issue.

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