



**Public Input of Virginia E. Palacios  
Executive Director of Commission Shift  
Railroad Commission of Texas Open Meeting  
May 12, 2026**

A few weeks ago, another leak from a plugged well sprung up in Ward County, this time in a populated area: Grandfalls, Texas. Since 2021, we've seen consistent high profile leaks, blowouts, or earthquakes in the Permian Basin, many taking place in Ward County.

We need the commission to take both preventative and responsive measures to protect drinking water and infrastructure against these threats. The Seismic Response Areas the commission has set up are both preventative and responsive. However, the response has shifted injection to shallow areas and may be causing more leaks through legacy oil and gas wells like the one in Grandfalls. Though shallow injection may reduce seismicity, it poses risks to groundwater.

The Oil and Gas Division presented its proposed emergency response plan to operators in March and suggested an Operator-Led Emergency Response Action, or OLERA. Only industry was invited to give feedback on the proposal.

What I liked about the proposal is that it says we must "revisit assumptions of the 'infinitely acting reservoir,'" and instead plan for injection to be temporary and physically limited. I am also here to support the commission's proposal to implement injection moratoriums and re-evaluate existing permits.

As I have stated before, the commission has permitting authority so that you can say 'no' sometimes. If letting oil and gas companies operate without oversight was harmless, then we

wouldn't need permits. But we've had to learn the hard way for over 135 years of the Railroad Commission's history, that this industry needs someone to say 'no' sometimes. I'm grateful for your leadership and for staff's willingness to propose what may be unpopular ideas to the operators.

One part of the proposal that concerns me is a suggestion that the oil and gas companies could influence the commission's designated response radius during an emergency if they participate in the OLERA. If there is a flexible response radius that operators influence, they might suggest a radius that gives preference to companies they have a financial interest in. While we understand that local operators will be the most knowledgeable parties to respond to an emergency well leak, we've seen what happens when the industry self-regulates: the solutions that are best for the public are not always chosen.

Finally, the latest leak in Ward County makes it obvious that the Class II injection well rules have major flaws. We recommend the commission take a preventative approach by updating the rules statewide. We'd like to see a rulemaking that incorporates some of what the RRC has learned over the past five years of incidents, and we encourage you to involve the public from the start. Thank you for your progress so far.