

Chapter X. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONCERNING THE TNRCC

INTRODUCTION

Six years ago the TNRCC was created to consolidate most of the state's major environmental and natural resource programs into a single agency, in order to offer comprehensive natural resource conservation service to Texas. Consolidation achieved several positive benefits almost from the start, including elimination of duplication of a number of administrative duties such as human resource, physical plant and vehicle fleet operations. Consolidation also set the stage for development of a Performance Partnership Agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, allowing the TNRCC latitude in allocating resources and setting priorities based on the state's unique natural resource protection needs. This agreement was the culmination of a long period that saw the authorization of almost all major federal environmental programs to Texas for local administration on the basis of the state's strict environmental laws and regulations.

Consolidation also eliminated duplication of many natural resource protection programs at the state level, along with a conscientious effort by the TNRCC to develop a number of memoranda of agreement and other cooperative relationships with other state, regional and local agencies with shared jurisdiction for natural resource protection. Nevertheless, opportunities for improving the coordination of natural resource protection programs remain, as do the prospects for improving service delivery to the people of Texas. The recognition by TNRCC commissioners and staff that work remains to be done has resulted in several major reviews of agency operations in the past several years.

Each of these projects made specific recommendations for improvements, and were followed with implementation projects with specific goals and objectives. In 1997, the TNRCC undertook an extensive Business Process Review, that studied the agency's corporate culture and made specific recommendations for eliminating program overlaps and bridging gaps in compliance and enforcement by developing a more functional, multi-media program orientation. This project has led to a series of restructuring projects within the agency, culminating in the creation of multi-media offices for permitting, compliance and enforcement, field operations, small business and environmental assistance and strategic planning and assessment. In 1998, the agency developed a comprehensive Information Strategy Plan, to integrate the TNRCC's massive information resources and make them more user friendly for governments, the public and regulated entities alike. The Legislature reinforced the goals and objectives of the plan by providing funding for several projects aimed at improving the agency's information management. In 1998, the agency took a pro-active stance toward encouraging industry to reduce, reuse and recycle waste by instituting a Pollution Prevention Integration Project, which identifies opportunities for extending pollution prevention techniques throughout agency operations. Finally, consolidation has allowed the agency to move staff resources to its 16 field offices as part of an overall effort to develop a strong regional presence around the state. This has created some opportunities for reducing the square footage of rented office space for the TNRCC's Austin headquarters. The following discussion provides a brief overview of these projects and the progress made to date toward achieving their goals and objectives.

1. BUSINESS PROCESS REVIEW (November 1997 - May 1998)

In a move to evaluate agency efficiency and responsiveness, the Commission authorized a review of major processes in late 1997. Following a contract bid process, the TNRCC requested TechLaw, Inc. (formerly A.T. Kearney) to review a number of its key work processes in order to recommend process,

managerial and organizational improvements. The key work processes identified were: permitting, compliance, and monitoring/assessment and planning. The scope of these processes were:

- ! **Permitting**- reviewing and analyzing how permitting processes work within the agency using five selected types of permits as examples. These permits were identified by the TNRCC as New Source Review (NSR) Permits, Operating Permits, Wastewater Permits, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Permits, and RCRA Hazardous Waste Permits.
- ! **Compliance** - reviewing and analyzing how the TNRCC plans and targets compliance activities (e.g., inspections, monitoring, compliance assistance, and complaint investigation). The scope of this review did not include how the TNRCC performs inspections.
- ! **Monitoring/Assessment and Planning** - reviewing and analyzing how the TNRCC collects and uses data in planning and decision-making.

The project was conducted in two phases. Phase I of this project was to identify and assess current processes for the study areas. This information was documented in a Phase I Findings Report. The Phase I Findings Report provided a description of current process activities and drew conclusions about inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of each process. Phase II of this project was to formulate recommendations for process, management and organizational improvements for the three processes. This report, Proposed Organization, Management and Business Process Final Report, documents TechLaw's recommendations for each of the three processes.

Phase I

The Phase I Findings Report (February 1998) identified key findings and conclusions drawn from evaluating the current permitting, compliance, and monitoring, assessment and planning processes. Highlights of some of the significant findings which were used as a basis for the recommendations have been summarized below:

Permitting

The various media programs (e.g. air, water and waste programs) charged with issuance of permits have substantial differences in terminology, use unique quantitative standards, make differing use of compliance histories, differing levels of flexibility of conditions, and employ different prioritization protocols.

Phase I Findings: Permitting

- ! TNRCC customers applying for multiple permits are subjected to separate, long-lasting, and complicated permit application processes. Such differences lead to variations in the compliance and enforcement of TNRCC's permits.
- ! Lack of flexibility across permit programs.
- ! High number of administratively incomplete applications.
- ! Inconsistent and improper use of the Office of the Chief Clerk.

- ! Lack of multimedia permitting which can cause the TNRCC to lose site-wide perspective of permitted facilities, so that the agency cannot assess cumulative risks.
- ! Public notice requirements differing across programs.
- ! Permit writers becoming advocates of the permits they are issuing. This contributes to a high level of Notices of Deficiency (NODs) and contributes to more contested case hearings.

Phase 1 Findings: Compliance

- ! The TNRCC spends a large amount of time collecting a wealth of uncoordinated, unintegrated data. Relatively little attention is paid to creating a *pro-active* multi-media compliance plan.
- ! TNRCC’s compliance planning is not integrated or coordinated across media programs. Each media derives its own inspection targeting priorities and approaches. Each media uses different compliance information and uses compliance information differently. Each media receives various levels of input from field staff.
- ! Monitoring activities are extremely fragmented. This hinders the effective use of data for big-picture compliance planning.
- ! Not only is there no single definition for “compliance assistance,” but also *in-depth* compliance assistance is provided only in pockets of TNRCC.
- ! The TNRCC does not proactively pursue blind spots, (i.e. middle-sized facilities, non-notifiers, non-renewers, permit rejections).

Phase 1 Findings: Monitoring/Assessment and Planning

The TNRCC performs extensive monitoring/assessment and planning activities only in selected media programs.

Phase 1 Findings: Monitoring/Assessment and Planning (cont.)

- ! There is inadequate communication and coordination between media programs for the purpose of environmental planning.
- ! Interpretation of environmental data is limited.
- ! Databases are fragmented and incompatible.

Phase II

Phase II of the Business Process Review (BPR) included the analysis and formulation of recommendations for agency consideration.

There are several key themes to the recommendations. These include:

- ! The current permitting processes can be streamlined to free considerable resources.
- ! Compliance planning should be performed from a multimedia perspective.
- ! Environmental planning should be adequately prioritized.

The specific recommendations contained in the report are listed here by category:

Phase II Permitting Recommendations

- ! Standardize Permit Process with Multiple Paths.
- ! Conduct Pre-Permit Planning and Institute Early Public Notice.
- ! Reduce Notices of Deficiency.
- ! Standardize Definition and Approach Completeness Reviews.
- ! Reduce Permit Processing of Many Renewals.
- ! Define Roles and Responsibilities of Office of Chief Clerk.
- ! Maximize Permit Enforceability.
- ! Develop Additional Permit Exemptions and General Permits.
- ! Institute a Multimedia Permitting Approach.
- ! Provide Public Participation
- ! Change Approach to Permit Renewals.

Phase II Compliance Recommendations:

- ! Establish a Single, TNRCC-wide Compliance Planning Process.
- ! Ensure Compliance Planning Proactively Addresses Non-mandated Environmental Activities (i.e. unpermitted and medium-sized facilities for which there is no federal mandate to inspect.).
- ! Organize all TNRCC Compliance Activities by function, rather than by office.
- ! Improve Interaction Between Headquarters and Regional Offices.
- ! Coordinate and Integrate Compliance Data.
- ! Develop New Negotiation Approach for Federal and State Mandates.

Phase II Planning Recommendations:

- ! Institutionalize Environmental Planning in the Agency’s Strategic Planning Process.
- ! Establish a Strategic Environmental Planning Manager Position.
- ! Establish a Planning Advisory Group.
- ! Establish Program Office Planning Liaisons.
- ! Clarify the Capabilities of the Databases Maintained by the Agency for Planning Purposes and Establish a Core Set of Environmental Planning Data.
- ! Perform Monitoring/Assessment and Planning Activities on a Multimedia Basis.

Organizational Implications of Recommendations

The TNRCC is currently organized by both process (e.g., the enforcement portion of the Office of Compliance and Enforcement) and by media program (e.g., Office of Air Quality). Data collection, monitoring, assessment, planning and permitting are the key activities in the media program offices. One key finding from Phase I of this project was that planning activities are not prioritized at TNRCC. However, TechLaw believed that environmental planning and data assessment are the most important activities the TNRCC should be performing. TechLaw recommended that an Office of Planning be established to place significant importance on environmental planning activities. This would drive the agency toward multimedia planning and assessment.

While the recommendations made for permitting could occur within the media programs (short-term recommendations), TechLaw has also recommended that a senior level manager be accountable for all permitting activities and to ensure the implementation of the permitting recommendations. Since TechLaw has recommended an Office of Planning and there is already an Office of Compliance and Enforcement, creating an Office of Permitting as a framework to support process improvements is also recommended. In order to ease in a transition to a process driven organization, TechLaw has recommended that, in the short-term, the media divisions remain in the newly created Offices of Planning and Permitting. This short-term organization would be in place while the TNRCC determines which of the sections in the current media offices should be moved into other areas of the agency.

A long-term organizational recommendation is to completely functionalize the process-based organization. This would involve performing activities from a multimedia perspective. However, there are several barriers to overcome including:

- ! Information Management Systems must be linked so that data can be integrated and shared.
- ! The budgeting process (Federal and State monies) would need to be re-engineered so that program funds can be shared.

Current Status of BPR Recommendation Implementation

As of **July 30, 1999**, the following completion percentages were achieved:

Overall Implementation Complete - 74 %

Permitting Completion Status

11 Total Recommendations (72% Complete)

- Create Standard Permit Process. (74%)
- Institute Early Public Notice. (87%)
- Standardize Admin Completeness Reviews. (73%)
- Reduce Permit Renewal Processing Time. (74%)
- Institute Multi-media Approach to Permitting. (78%)
- Improve Public Participation in Permit Process. (74%)
- Change Approach to Permit Renewals. (53%)
- Reduce Notice of Deficiencies (66%)
- Define Chief Clerk Responsibilities Re: Public Notices (97%)
- Maximize Permit Enforceability (69%)
- Develop Additional Permit Exemptions and General Permits (50%)

Compliance Completion Status

6 Total Recommendations (75% Complete)

- Establish Single Compliance Planning Process (100%)
- Address Non-mandated Environmental Activities (100%)
- Functionalize Compliance Assistance (100%)
- Improve Interaction w/ Regional Offices (100%)
- Coordinate and Integrate Compliance Data (50%)
- New Approach for Federal/State Mandates (TBD)

Planning Completion Status

6 Total Recommendations (77%)

- Institutionalize Environmental Planning (100%)
- Establish Strategic Environmental Planning Manager (100%)
- Establish Planning Advisory Group (100%)
- Establish Planning Liaison Positions (100%)
- Establish Core Set of Environmental Planning Data (30%)
- Perform Multi-Media Monitoring/Assessment and Planning (30%)

Implementation of the recommendations from the BPR continue to be tracked monthly and reported on the Executive Information System Web page of the Agency Website.

2. INFORMATION STRATEGY PLAN (ISP) (FEB 1998 - SEP 1998)

In February of 1998, the TNRCC launched a process to develop an Information Strategy Plan (ISP). The primary purpose was to identify the necessary steps to achieve a more integrated, accessible, and functional use of the environmental information collected by the agency. The Agency had recognized that current information management resources and practices were not adequately supporting agency objectives. Specifically, while mechanisms are in place to help individual programs within the agency address information needs, TNRCC has not been able to adequately meet agency-wide information needs. Using the U.S. EPA One Stop Program for grants to improve environmental information management, the agency contracted through the U.S. EPA Region 6, for the services of Ross and Associates and Claremont Technology, Inc. to develop the TNRCC Information Strategy Plan. The methodology employed by the consultants to assist in developing the Plan included, as a foundation, an assessment of the Agency's information needs from a business process perspective. This was accomplished through a series of day-long needs assessment sessions with each of the major Offices in the Agency.

Thirteen such sessions were conducted, including three in the field offices resulting in a compilation of commonly needed agency-wide information. The meetings also identified areas in need of information management improvement. These needed improvements were documented in the Information Strategy Plan. Recommendations and rationale from the ISP were submitted as part of the Legislative Appropriations Request this year to substantiate requests for necessary resources to carry out the Plan recommendations.

Further pursuit of an overall Agency information access strategy included the involvement of major stakeholders. To attract the perspective and insights of the regulated community, the Executive and Legislative branches of state government, the environmental/citizen interest groups, and the EPA Region 6 offices, needs assessment sessions with staff representatives of the legislature, the Governor's Office, and the environmental and regulated communities also were held..

The development of the ISP included a phase of existing condition determination. The findings by the consultant served as the basis for evaluation and priority needs. As described in greater detail in Section III of the ISP, the agency has inherited a series of legacy systems from its predecessor agencies. In addition, since TNRCC is an environmental agency, its information management traditionally has been driven by the needs of individual environmental regulatory programs. The result of the legacy systems and the media-program organization is to present TNRCC with a series of technical and organizational challenges in establishing preferred environmental information management capabilities.

Specific objectives included in the decision to prepare the Information Strategy Plan were to:

- ! Clarify information needs as an agency rather than as a collection of individual programs;
- ! Define a concrete vision for the capabilities that information resources must provide the agency;
- ! Assess the ability to meet agency needs given existing information systems;

- ! Prepare a high level plan to support a systematic, incremental effort to improve the agency's information systems over time to meet its strategic and evolving needs, and
- ! Clarify and support funding needs for information management improvements.

The ISP is a high-level *strategic* plan. It is not a detailed technical document, intended to define and document needed technical decisions and investments. Rather, as a strategic document, it identifies the direction that the agency is headed and describes the types of information management capabilities that the agency needs. In short, the ISP has two key functions: 1) to define the vision for information management that the agency wants to create; and 2) to identify the agency's priorities for improving certain types of information as it works to achieve that vision. Both are necessary to allow the agency to focus on the important needs and not get distracted by lesser demands. By identifying the agency's vision and priorities for improvement, the ISP acts as a guide to orient the subsequent detailed investments and decisions that the agency will need to make regarding information system improvements.

The documented information needs of internal personnel and those of external parties are summarized in appendices of the ISP Final Report. As the agency implements the recommendations, these internal and external parties will be consulted further.

The report cites the existing challenges and how the agency continues to address its three main technical challenges. First, TNRCC's systems remain excessively fragmented within and between programs. There exist numerous data systems that contain similar or overlapping information. Most systems are not connected, cannot talk to one another, and require separate data entry and separate data query and analysis.

Second, many large and small agency data systems are difficult to use. Most users indicate that they have limited or no access to many key systems. When they do have access, users frequently indicate that the system functionality constrains their query of the systems to obtain meaningful information.

Third, data quality in many systems is perceived by users to be poor, probably as a result of the preceding two problems. The redundancy of information contained across the various information systems makes data entry and data update problematic: it is difficult to update/correct common data in every system in which it occurs. Inconsistency is the result. Further, system fragmentation and poor system functionality discourage ready and frequent system use. This means that data content and quality is not adequately scrutinized. According to the report "continued efforts by TNRCC are needed to address these technical challenges, to integrate key information, to eliminate redundancy in TNRCC systems, and to improve users' access to the systems and data they require."

There are two types of specific recommendations in the ISP: tactical and strategic. The tactical recommendation are designed to provide near-term, but narrow, benefit to staff. The strategic recommendations involve longer-term investments that are designed to provide comprehensive improvements in information management support.

Tactical ISP Recommendations

The review also recognized that, while long-term investments are warranted to effect comprehensive benefits in information management, there is also a need for near-term investments to alleviate current shortcomings in information management. The ISP, therefore, recommended three short-term, tactical projects to identify and implement improvements relatively quickly. The three tactical recommendations are:

- ! Improve access and functionality of a few major systems such as TRACS and PSDB.
- ! Improve access to and delivery of policy/procedure and regulatory information.
- ! Improve access to compliance histories of regulated entities.

Strategic ISP Recommendations

The highest priority for improvement was the identification of key business areas (a methodological term that refers to groupings of program functions [activities] and information) as follows:

- ! Universal identification of regulated entities.
- ! Improved characterization of environmental conditions.
- ! Better tracking of compliance and enforcement activity.
- ! Regulated entity activity/release characterization: the integration and sharing of key information about the activities and pollutant releases of regulated entities;
- ! Permit development and management: information about the permit development process and permit conditions;

ISP Implementation and Planned Activities

Mr. Bruce Humphrey was selected as the Information Strategy Plan Implementation Manager in December 1998. Mr. Humphrey is responsible for providing agency leadership and coordination for the tasks associated with implementation of ISP recommendations. The agency Information Technology Work Group (ITWG) has been reorganized to more effectively address the ISP recommendations in cooperation with the Office of Administrative Services and the Information Technology Division. The ITWG is developing new information technology procedures to address the ISP which are then approved by the Information Technology Steering Committee (ITSC). These procedures address how projects will be structured, tracked and funded. In further support of the ISP implementation, the ITSC approved the consolidation of all agency information technology funding control within the Information Technology Work Group to improve purchase methodology, consistency and conformity.

The recent legislative session approved several major projects on the agency exceptional items list that deal specifically with the implementation of the ISP. Included in that listing are the Water Availability Project (\$3.13 million), Central Registry (\$2.26 million), Consolidated Compliance and Enforcement

Database (\$3.2 million) and Water and Water Quality Improvement (\$1.6 million) for a total of approximately \$10.2 million funding to address elements of the ISP. In addition, the agency has completed the development and release of a Request for Offers (RFO) for contracting the design and implementation of major portions of the ISP structure. This contract will specifically address the first and second Strategic Recommendation, and prepare the technology specifications for the third and fourth Strategic Recommendations. An ISP implementation timeline has been developed to reflect the contractual effort and related activities for management visibility and tracking.

3. POLLUTION PREVENTION INTEGRATION

In 1998, the TNRCC launched a new initiative to increase pollution prevention integration into the agency's existing and future regulatory programs. The agency undertook this effort to promote the elimination of pollution at the source, what is known as "source reduction."

Under the direction of the agency's Pollution Prevention (P2) Steering Committee, the TNRCC has been implementing its Action Plan for Integrating Pollution Prevention into Regulatory Programs to reduce emissions and waste generation through source reduction strategies.

Pollution prevention integration at the TNRCC has three components:

- ! Pollution prevention is a routine consideration in all agency operations, including regulatory and policy development, permitting, compliance and enforcement, and inspections.
- ! Agency staff encourage emission sources and facilities to implement source reduction strategies before considering pollution control, waste minimization, recycling, treatment, and disposal.
- ! Agency staff have access to pollution prevention training and tools that increase P2 knowledge, career development, and information transfer, resulting in better environmental performance by industry, government, and the public.

To track results, the agency's Pollution Prevention Steering Committee has established performance measurement criteria:

- Pollution Prevention Actions Completed
- Pollution Prevention Staff Training
- Environmental Results

Pollution Prevention Actions Completed

The project's first performance status report was published in June 1999. The TNRCC has documented the number of pollution prevention integration actions or projects undertaken by staff in enforcement, field operations, permitting rulemaking, and the coatings sector project. The number of pollution prevention actions completed increased by 49 percent, rising from 52 in FY1998 to 106 as of June 1999. The following are examples of these actions:

- The number of Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEPs) has increased from 11 in FY1996 to 36 in FY1997, to 41 in FY1998, including 12 which involve pollution prevention and waste reduction initiatives. Two pollution prevention SEP case studies were developed in FY1999 and are being used in training and SEP outreach.

- The New Source Review Program has prepared a Source Reduction Alternatives Guidance for Best Available Control Technology (BACT) for ten industrial process areas. The purpose of the project is to integrate pollution prevention into the technical guidance documents used by permit writers and the regulated community in the preparation of air permits.
- The number of rules with pollution prevention components increased from zero in FY1998 to eight as of June 1999. In addition, the number of multi-media rulemaking teams at the agency increased from 10 in FY1998 to 24 in FY1999, which represents a more holistic approach to rulemaking.

Pollution Prevention Staff Training

The number of TNRCC staff attending agency pollution prevention training has increased by 63 percent with 390 training in FY1998 and 612 trained in FY1999. Other reports include:

- The Field Operations Division has incorporated a pollution prevention module into annual inspector training events and manuals, created an inspector pollution prevention certification for career development purposes, and established a pollution prevention referral system for pollution prevention technical assistance.
- In July 1999, a pollution prevention expert at E.I. du Pont conducted a process engineering pollution prevention seminar to TNRCC permit writers. This customized training was developed jointly with the permit staff, pollution prevention staff and du Pont.
- The Pollution Prevention Rules Training Module was launched in June 1999. This training program includes examples of state and federal rules incorporating pollution prevention and includes recommendations for staff on where pollution prevention can best be incorporated into the rules process.

Environmental Results

The agency is tracking the environmental results achieved via the agency's pollution prevention integration activities:

- The TNRCC Enforcement Office reported that 238 pollution prevention actions were taken by the regulated community, resulting from the issuance of Enforcement Orders and Judgments in FY1998. Over 2.5 billion pounds of contaminants and pollutants were reduced or eliminated as a result of these enforcement actions.
- The New Source Review Program estimates that at least 20,000 tons per year of criteria air pollutant reductions are attributable to source reduction. IN FY2000, the air permitting program will establish a database tracking system to measure reductions achieved via air permitting for both pollution control and prevention.
- Pollution prevention assistance providers conducted pollution prevention site assistance visits for five facilities as part of the Industrial Coatings Project and the Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL) program. In early 2000, the TNRCC will survey these facilities to report VOC reductions, hazardous waste reductions, water conservation and energy savings resulting from site visits.

4. STRENGTHENING TNRCC FIELD OPERATIONS

The TNRCC has a major local presence in 16 regional offices, five satellite offices and two bay and estuary program offices distributed from the Gulf Coast to El Paso and from the Mexican Border to the Panhandle. Nevertheless, the agency has a highly centralized staffing pattern, with 2,100 of its 2,746 employees located at Austin headquarters at the end of FY1998.

The reasons for this concentration of staff include the need to centralize the expertise needed to prepare air, water and waste permits; to centralize the expertise for a variety of assessment functions, and for central administration purposes. The agency's FTE cap also makes it difficult to increase staffing in regional offices without making substantial changes in headquarters staffing.

The TNRCC has recognized the need for a stronger field presence in order to achieve more effective compliance with state and federal environmental laws. The TNRCC has begun a comprehensive effort to move more positions to field offices through reorganization also aimed at increasing central office efficiency.

The Small Business and Environmental Assistance Division has already undergone a significant reorganization that will permit the movement of 20 staff positions to field offices by the end of FY1999. These positions will be reconfigured as contact and outreach positions for local government, small business, pollution prevention and recycling programs of the agency. More transfers of positions are contemplated, and TNRCC has plans to move more than 100 positions to various field offices by the end of FY2000.

In order to further improve its service delivery at the local level, the TNRCC has also begun contracting with local entities and political subdivisions for projects that are best done on a local or regional level. For example, assessment projects involving the Total Daily Maximum Load Program, which will establish limits for pollutants in identified surface water bodies and stream segments, will involve considerable work by local assistance providers including local governments and universities. In the Houston area, several local government agencies already provide air monitoring services for the TNRCC in its efforts to establish whether the region is meeting federal clean air standards.

The TNRCC will continue and enhance its efforts to improve regional service delivery through a combination of strengthening field office staffs and through partnerships and contracts with local service providers for assessment, monitoring and other activities that support the compliance and enforcement activities of the agency.

Emphasizing regional office operations creates some additional opportunities for streamlining operations in Austin. The TNRCC leases 547,825 square feet of office space at its headquarters location, the Park 35 complex in Austin. As a result of various office consolidations and some relocation of personnel to field offices, pockets of office space have been created in the Austin headquarters, and more can be expected if the present move towards consolidation and movement to the field continues. All TNRCC regional offices have been redesigned to allow for an increase in personnel at each respective office. The agency has also planned to provide growth space sufficient to last the regional offices three years.

To date, the TNRCC has relinquished approximately 7,500 square feet of office space in building F of the Park 35 complex to the Texas Commission on Fire Protection. By November 1999, the TNRCC will give up another 600 square feet of office space to the Texas Commission on Fire Protection. Another 2,000 square feet has been provided to the Texas Pollutant Discharge Elimination System program for their records storage and retention requirements. The TNRCC's lease on Building F in the Park 35 complex will expire on November 2, 2002.

CONCLUSION

Consolidation of natural resource programs has produced many benefits to Texas. In its six years of existence, the TNRCC has achieved measurable results in reducing the release and transfers of toxic chemicals to air, land and water. Many of these results have been achieved by voluntary programs that rely on extensive partnerships between the TNRCC, local and regional governments and industries and other institutions. The overwhelming majority of Texans now get their drinking water from regulated systems that meet or exceed federal clean water standards. In other categories, facilities inspected by the TNRCC have very high rates of compliance with state and federal environmental regulations, and compliance rates in most categories have improved in recent years. Where regulated entities are not in compliance, the TNRCC has taken aggressive enforcement action that has earned millions of dollars in judgements and provided millions more for alternative community environmental projects.

The Texas experience with natural resource protection has demonstrated that a single, comprehensive natural resource and environmental protection agency can achieve economies of scale, reduce duplication and overlap of program delivery, and make progress toward closing gaps in compliance and enforcement. Such an agency, organized along functional and multi-media lines, can make the most efficient use of its personnel technical facilities and physical plant. The TNRCC has also moved away from “one size fits all” solutions to a more regionally based approach that takes the enormous diversity of the state’s natural resources into account. The agency is in the process of developing a strategic level planning capability that help to identify further opportunities for developing natural resource protection strategies that are most appropriate for the unique needs of each region of Texas.

Nevertheless, every TNRCC employee from commissioner to field inspector, understand the need to make continuous improvements in the agency in order to better serve the state’s interests. In moving toward that end, the agency has undertaken major reviews of its business processes, information management and opportunities for cross-program integration of pollution prevention projects. The agency is moving toward strengthening its field offices in order to further address the varying needs of the different regions of Texas. In short, the TNRCC is working to make the best use of its resources in order to improve the job it is doing of protecting the state’s resources: clean air, clean water and a fertile land.