

**Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
WATER UTILITY OPERATOR LICENSING ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**March 8, 2005
1:00 p.m.**

**Texas A&M Campus
Memorial Student Center, Room 342
College Station, Texas**

MINUTES

Members Attending

Mary P. Baiza
Larry Bell
Richard E. Harbuck
David Harris
Cathy Henderson
Charles R. Maddox, P.E.
Debbie Magin
Mike Moreno, Jr.
Ted Neumann
George Patterson
Robert Riley
David L. Yohe

Members Absent

Mauro J. Perez

Others Attending

Beverly Benson, President, Engitech Environmental Training, Bryan TX
Tanny Busby, President, Texas Water Utilities Association
Debbie McReynolds, Director of Utilities, City of Odessa

TCEQ Compliance Support Division Staff Attending

Noreen Helmle
Linda Saladino
Terry Thompson

Cathy Henderson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and confirmed that a quorum was present. Committee members and other attendees introduced themselves. The Minutes of the November 12, 2004 Meeting were presented for approval. There was a motion and a second and all members voted to approve them. Cathy received one nomination for Committee Vice Chair, Charles Maddox. All members voted for him to serve as Vice Chair. Cathy informed the members that the following members' terms would expire effective August 31, 2005: Mary Baiza, David Harris, Cathy Henderson, Mike Moreno Jr., and Mauro J. Perez. All of these members, with the exception of Mauro Perez who was absent, were interested in submitting their

resumes for consideration for serving another term. Noreen Helmle explained that they could submit their resumes when nominations are requested.

Beverly Benson of Engitech Environmental Inc. gave an update on the Texas Small Public Water System Training Program which is funded by an EPA Expense Reimbursement Grant. There are approximately 4,500 eligible small water system operators in Texas, approximately 1.5 operators per system. To-date, 1,922 operators and 1,196 systems have registered in the program. 400+ coupons have been issued for free training. \$70,000 has been paid from the grant funds for licensing and exam fees for small water system operators. Ten trainers have completed the Cluster Trainer Workshop and the first cluster training will be held on Friday, March 11, 2005. The first Cluster Training course has been approved as a 10-hr. course. Each trainer has been assigned a geographic area where they will train. Prior to each regional school, Engitech, TRWA and TWUA are sending post card reminders to operators about the free training that is available through the coupon system. TRWA & TWUA have published articles about the program in their journals. A Surface Water Training Advisory Group is currently being formed and Beverly encouraged committee members to participate or recommend to her individuals who could participate. Training DVDs and videos are currently in production that will be distributed to small water operators at no charge.

Terry Thompson, Team Leader, Licensing Section, TCEQ Compliance Support Division, told the Committee that no bills for licensing had been introduced at the Legislative Session so far. Terry announced the division within TCEQ that handled rule revisions no longer exists. These functions will be performed within each program.

The division is planning on opening Chapter 30 to clean up some items from the last rule revision. Terry is providing a review of the rules for “enforceability” such as changing language to include “shall” or “must.” Present process requires red-line strike outs before distribution. Terry said he would email concept paper to all members when complete and notify the committee when Chapter 30 would be available for comments.

Terry announced that TCEQ may begin using Texas On-Line to renew licenses. If implemented, an increase in the licensing fees would be necessary across-the-board, whether Texas On-Line was used or not. The Committee discussed this extensively. There were comments made that small water systems probably wouldn't use it. Terry said it was still in the discussion stage. Cathy Henderson requested that the Committee be kept in the loop on this issue. The Committee will address it in writing at the appropriate time.

Terry told the committee that licensing exams were no longer being offered at the TCEQ Dallas/Fort Worth office. They are being offered in Arlington by the Council of Governments for an additional fee to the operator. There were suggestions for alternative locations for the exams, i.e., Trinity River Authority, Junior Colleges.

Linda Saladino, TCEQ Training Specialist, offered congratulations and thanks to TEEX and Richard Harbuck for the successful development and approval of the SWPII course. The course was approved March 2, 2005. A TRWA course manual is currently undergoing a technical review. Linda was asked to let the committee know when TRWA obtains approval.

Cathy's question concerning SWPII's availability at the regional schools, particularly the TWUA school in May, was directed to Richard Harbuck. Richard suggested she contact him to make arrangements as some of the other schools are already scheduled and the instructors' availability was limited. TEEX has scheduled several courses already. Cathy asked if a course outline was available to develop the courses and Linda affirmed the outline was available but asked Richard when the manual would be available for sale to other providers. Richard planned to hold the course 3-4 times before the manual would be offered for sale to make any other revisions students, instructors, or others found necessary. Presently, the course is scheduled next week in Nederland, the Beaumont Regional School, and then at least once more before publishing the manual for sale to other providers. Due to the amount of material covered and the hands-on portion, the class size is limited to 25. Priority was being given to D level (cannot be renewed) and C level operators that require the course for the next level of license.

David Yohe asked if all surface water operators need to take the SWPII course by 2007 per the 290 rules? Linda will check with the program on this issue.

Linda informed the committee that TCEQ was planning on revising the format of the A Water and Wastewater Exams to eliminate the essay section of the test. Presently, there are 4 essay questions worth a total of 20 points: 3 points for correct content and 2 points for writing. This allows only 8 points to assess writing skills competency, skills we are trying to test but are not part of required training. Per Juanita Lopez, the current A Exams are difficult for staff to administer and grade and for applicants to schedule. The proposed revision should remove the subjectivity from the test evaluation, shorten result response time and make it possible to easily transition to computer testing in the future to improve efficiency of the examination procedure. Furthermore, exams could be offered in the regions and applicants would not have to travel to Austin or the regional schools.

Linda provided an example of the Landscape Irrigator Exam format change from a hand-graded design as part of the exam. The resulting pass rates actually decreased from 75% to 50-60% when the design was moved to the class and objective questions covering the topic were substituted on the examination. TCEQ does not want to make the A exams easier. Linda further explained that there were several options in the formatting of the objective questions that would retain the difficulty of the test. When asked if the committee felt the exam should include questions concerning writing, several members concurred this was not necessary. Rather, the committee wanted questions with a high level of difficulty. Linda agreed the questions needed to test higher level thinking skills and complex problem solving and requested a subcommittee of the Advisory Committee to assist in the development of the replacement questions.

Cathy asked for volunteers to serve on the subcommittee. Ted Neumann, Robert Riley, Cathy Henderson, David Yohe, and David Harris volunteered. Linda will select from this group. Reviewers need to be Double A's for security concerns.

Linda presented proposed revisions to RG-373, the guidance document used by TCEQ to approve training. A memo to all committee members summarizing the revisions and a draft of RG-373 was emailed or faxed the week prior to the meeting for their review (attached). The initial need for revisions was purely to clarify and update existing procedures. TCEQ is receiving nearly double the applications for approval from the previous years and many are for distance learning courses produced by individuals with little or no experience in training or the industry. There presently are no requirements for training developers for distance education. The review of this training is very time consuming with TCEQ serving as the editor for these training courses. TCEQ would like to improve the interactivity of on-line training to improve learning. George Patterson volunteered to be on a subcommittee to provide input on the revisions.

David Harris, Cathy Henderson, and Ted Neumann discussed TWUA meetings' training credit at length since approval for only the training at the meetings with a 1-hour minimum would be considered. Cathy reiterated that some chapters/districts were serious about training and should not be punished for what some others are doing. David Harris said if the operators did not get enough credit it was not worth it for him to send his operators. Many operators drive a distance to get to the meetings and will not go for only one hour of credit. Also, the programs are not always as worthwhile as visiting with other operators. Several members commented about TCEQ Field Investigator involvement in the "training" at TWUA meetings. Tanny Busby, President of TWUA, provided comments also.

Cathy Henderson suggested a subcommittee as the issue was too complex to continue the discussions with the full committee. Volunteers for the subcommittee included George Patterson, Debbie Magin, Charles Maddox, and Larry Bell. Linda will select members, add other licensing program representatives, and schedule a meeting within the next 30 days. All members were encouraged to email comments to Linda or mark on the draft copy and fax to Linda within the next 2 weeks. Copies of the draft will be sent to all distance learning providers and other interested parties who had asked to comment. All comments will be taken into consideration, however, suggestions to solve the present problems is what is needed.

David Yohe asked about in-field citations. Terry said that he would check into it and respond to the Committee.

Ted Neumann asked if anyone had any comments about the Texas Board of Professional Engineers Policy Advisory that he distributed at the last meeting. A copy is attached to these Minutes. No one had any comments.

The next committee meeting was scheduled for June 24, 2005, 10:00 a.m., at the TCEQ offices in Austin.

Cathy Henderson, Chair, adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.