

Op Ed: Concerns about Funding Cuts Are Misinformed: TCEQ's Oversight Funding Has Increased

Your readers may be concerned by reports of crippling cuts to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's oversight funding. I would be too, if it were so.

But funding for TCEQ's oversight activities has *increased*.

Overall expenditures for TCEQ's oversight activities have *increased* by 5% over the past decade. Moreover, the largest line item for a TCEQ oversight function, expenditures for Field Inspections Complaints, *increased* by 15%.

The reporting misreads a recent study by the Environmental Integrity Project and mistakes total agency expenditures for oversight expenditures. The EIP study has flaws of its own.

Grant programs, especially the Texas Emission Reduction Plan, dominate TCEQ's budget. And grant funding has varied dramatically from year to year. But EIP fails to mention TCEQ's grants, much less address their significant impact to agency expenditures.

While TCEQ's overall expenditures have fluctuated significantly and in fact declined over the decade selected by EIP, funding for its oversight activities has fluctuated only modestly and with a modest growth trend. This has remained true even through the Great Recession.

Moreover, if we look back eleven years instead of EIP's ten, TCEQ's total expenditures have increased. And total expenditures have increased by more than ten percent in the last half of the decade, to nearly \$400 million.

As for staffing, your readers should know that TCEQ's staff is committed to serving their fellow Texans. That is part of what makes TCEQ a great place to work. In fact, *Forbes Magazine* has repeatedly identified the agency as one of the nation's best employers.

Even so, the agency is not immune to broad economic trends. The Great Recession did affect TCEQ's staffing levels. But EIP has transposed its digits and overstates—by more than double—the number of positions eliminated.

In the current low-unemployment environment, hiring has become more challenging. Now it is vacant positions, more than eliminated positions, that account for the agency's reduced numbers. TCEQ is nevertheless deploying adequate resources to meet or outperform its responsibilities.

For a more in-depth discussion about TCEQ funding and staffing and a look at the numbers, visit the [Spotlight section](#) on TCEQ's homepage.

- Chairman Jon Niermann

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