

Irrigator Advisory Council Minutes

****Thursday, February 1st, 2024, 9:00 a.m.****
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Call to Order

Introductions

Mr. Charles Swanson called the meeting to order at 9:00am.

The members of the council present via Teams included: Mr. Mark Peterson, Mr. DJ Seeger, Ms. Donna Starling, Mr. Norm Werback, Mr. Charles Swanson, Mr. James Garvin, Ms. Monique Cogburn, and Mr. Jimmy Burgdorf. Not in attendance was Mr. David Moulton.

TCEQ individuals in attendance were Mr. Thomas Minucci, Ms. Jayme Martone, Mr. Joseph Hopkins, Ms. Katherine McGlaughlin, Ms. Theresa Ethridge and Mr. Paul Munguia.

Approval of Previous Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. James Garvin to approve the minutes for the August 2023 IAC meeting as they were written, the motion was seconded by Mr. DJ Seeger. The vote to adopt was unanimously approved.

TCEQ Program Updates

Landscape Irrigation Program

Mr. Thomas Minucci gave the investigation update. Since the beginning of the fiscal year in September 2023, the TCEQ has received 45 new complaints, 6 currently open, and have approved 47 investigations. The most common complaints received pertained to allegations of individuals working without a license, advertising services without a license number on the advertisement, and incorrect type or installation of backflow preventers.

Cross-Connection Control

Ms. Katherine McGlaughlin, TCEQ Cross-Connection Control Program, provided an update on the activities of her program. The program continues to do form approvals for CSI and BPAT forms and respond to various technical questions.

Ms. McGlaughlin spoke about upcoming events, including a CSI training to be held in Bastrop, a wastewater conference in Eagle Pass, and the ABPA conference in April.

The Next Cross Connection Control Subcommittee meeting will be held on March 7, 2024.

Occupational Licensing

Mr. Paul Munguia, Occupational Licensing Team, provided statistics on pass fail rates and total number of license holders. He also discussed potentially updating, changing, or adding to the irrigator exam, which the recent Job Task Analysis survey will contribute to.

A discussion took place about the requirements to satisfy experience requirements for other occupational licensed such as CSI and BPAT.

Mr. Charles Swanson asked for clarification about the amount of time given at testing centers for the irrigator exam now that it is given on the computer. Mr. Munguia and Ms. Theresa Ethridge clarified

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that the irrigator exam now has a 6-hour time limit and some testing centers cannot accommodate the exam, so it is important to ensure the testing center the student signs up for actually offers the irrigator exam and they don't sign up for the technician exam by mistake.

Discussion on work-group progress

Web Content Work Group

Mr. DJ Seeger discussed the progress of the work group, including writing content to add to the program website and some new pages they would like added. More information will be made available for the council to discuss at the next meeting.

Survey Work Group

Mr. Thomas Minucci let the council know that the survey to get a better understanding of local programs across the state was sent out to approximately 131 recipients which work for municipalities with a population over 20,000 on Wednesday, January 31, 2024, with a deadline of completion of March 15, 2024. The council was interested in sending the survey link to their contacts around the state. A discussion of other potential groups to send the survey out to and potential next steps for legislative or policy recommendations once the survey is completed.

The council decided not to add any new work groups at this time.

New Business

Mr. Charles Swanson asked for clarification on why the council meetings are planned to be virtual for the foreseeable future. Mr. Joseph Hopkins explained that it is a budgeting and finance issue related to an agency-wide systems change that has caused some delays with reimbursement, as well as a need for more justification for the expenditure related to in person meetings. He clarified that they will likely go back to in person meetings, but there's not a set timeframe for that yet.

Letter to the IAC

Mr. Charles Swanson read to the council a letter which was addressed to them by a member of the public. Mr. Swanson then explained that he had been in contact with the individual and had sent him some information and contact info for the program staff. In the letter, the individual expressed frustration with the price they were given for some irrigation repairs, however multiple members of the council agreed that it was about average what they expected for that type of services. Mr. James Garvin mentioned reaching out to the individual to put them in touch with reputable licensed irrigators in their area.

Honorary License

Mr. Thomas Minucci relayed to the council that a retired irrigator, Mr. Stovy Bowlin, was interested in receiving an Honorary Irrigator license. Mr. Norm Werback explained the requirements to receive an honorary license and a discussion took place about granting the request. A motion to grant Mr. Bowlin

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an honorary irrigator license was made by Mr. James Garvin and seconded by Mr. Mark Peterson; the motion was approved by the council.

Revision on RG-466 (Landscape Irrigation Program: Implementation)

Mr. Thomas Minucci explained what the purpose of RG-466 is, a plain language version of the irrigation rules. Mr. Charles Swanson explained that instead of being a direct copy from statute, this document should possibly be in paragraph form explaining the major sections and chapters so homeowners or someone not as well versed can get a better understanding of the irrigation rules. He went on to explain that there have been rules changes since the document has been updated but that it shouldn't be a major undertaking to update. Mr. James Garvin recommended adding specific sample documents and that perhaps that could be a project for after the website work group wraps up their project.

It was decided that Mr. Minucci would send out copies of the relevant documents for the council to review and consider before the next meeting.

Discuss Making Sample Documents/Video Project

Homeowner Education

Mr. Charles Swanson led the discussion on potential future projects for the council, including homeowner education videos or graphics about what to expect when a customer gets a new system installed, information about common complaints made to the TCEQ, such as advertising complaints, what type of backflow preventer is required in specific conditions, and more. He mentioned it would be good for the council to put together the information for these and have them in line with the Hiring Licensed fliers.

It was decided to put these plans on hold while the current work groups wrapped up and that the edits to RG-466 would be the higher priority.

Outreach to Local Governments/Municipalities about Irrigation Requirements

Mr. Thomas Minucci let the council know that once the survey of current local programs is completed, one of the projects that could result from it could be creating videos or guidance for local programs on how to create and maintain an irrigation enforcement program.

Mr. Charles Swanson mentioned a utility which reached out to him for guidance about matched precipitation regarding zones which have both bubblers and drip on them. Mr. Norm Werback's feedback on the topic was an interest in the irrigator who installed the system being able to prove that the different emission devices actually have matched precipitation. Several other members of the council and members of the public present had similar comments, that the irrigator would need to be able to prove the hydraulic calculations and to be aware of different microclimate factors and plant types because those cannot mix within a given zone.

Individuals wishing to address the Council

There were no individuals who wanted to address the council.

Mr. James Garvin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Donna Starling seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:37am.