

IRRIGATOR ADVISORY COUNCIL (IAC)

February 25, 2009

Minutes - Draft

12100 Park 35 Circle, Building A, Room 202

Austin, Texas

9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

1. Call to order.

Chairman Goodwin called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m.

Attendees:

Council Members: Doug Goodwin, Deville Hubbard, David Bell, Emilio Escobar, Karen Guz, Nora Mullarkey, Michael Murr, Suzy Santo, and Rusty Tucker

TCEQ Staff: Tony Franco, Allan Vargas, Candy Garrett, Richard Allen, Jeff Walls, and Linda Saladino

Visitors: John Pollard, James Stewart, Joe Smolinski, Todd Magatagan, Gene Reagan, Lee Hamdan, Jeffrey Knight, Carey Smuin and Issac Smuin

2. Soils, Water Conservation, and the Texas Irrigator.

Mr. Issac Smuin presented information on the beneficial uses of mycorrhizal fungi. Adding mycorrhizal fungi to soil can strengthen the root systems of plants and turf reducing the amount of water required in landscapes.

3. Special Recognitions.

Chairman Goodwin noted the importance of the Honorary Irrigator title. Mr. Duane Polster was recognized for his service to the irrigation industry. Mr. Pollard volunteered to recognize Mr. Polster at a local association meeting.

4. Consider approval of minutes from the November 14, 2008 meeting.

Mr. Murr moved that the minutes be accepted. Mr. Escobar seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

5. Hear from individuals wishing to address the Council.

There were no individuals wishing to address the Council.

6. Receive, Discuss and Act on Staff Reports.

(a). TCEQ Staff Vacancies. Ms. Garrett reported that Mr. Jeff Walls, a licensed irrigator, began work on January 5, 2009. The Regulatory Compliance Section Manager position is vacant.

(b). Chapter 344 Rule Discussion. The Council discussed the need to have materials available in Spanish for Irrigation Technician candidates. Mr. Bell stated that it seemed to be a natural progression from and Irrigation Technician to an Irrigator and noted that minimal educational requirements for an Irrigator (such as a high school diploma or GED). There was a discussion about the number of applicants that fail the Irrigator's examination and that those individuals might choose to become an Irrigation Technician. Mr. Murr stated that minimal education requirements should be set. The Education Committee will consider these issues.

The Council encouraged training providers to develop Irrigation Technician classes and related materials that are appropriate for all audiences quickly, because there is a need and demand for the classes.

Ms. Garrett stated that the Irrigation Technician examination was being given in English for the first time on March 2nd. The Spanish translation of the exam is due to be completed by February 28, 2009. Changes may be made to the English and Spanish versions after the test is given and feedback obtained.

In response to a question, Ms. Saladino stated that training providers could work with distributors or others to sponsor training classes if advertisements clearly indicated the training provider and that the sponsor's information was not the major theme of the advertisement.

Mr. Franco discussed an initiative to distribute the irrigator license renewals to balance staff workload. As currently projected, there would be no renewals in calendar year 2010. Redistributing some of the renewal dates would allow staff to provide better service to irrigators wishing to renew their license. Costs and Continuing Education Units (CEUs) would be prorated.

(c) Outreach Activities. Ms. Garrett discussed upcoming activities that are currently planned.

(d). Irrigation Inspector and Irrigation Technician Licensing, Training and Testing. Ms. Garrett reported that there are currently 11 licensed Irrigation Inspectors. The Agency has received applications from 22 individuals for the Irrigation Inspectors license and 18 applicants have passed the test. Ms. Garrett reported that based on feedback after the first applicants took the Irrigation Inspectors examination, minor changes were made to three questions for clarity. There were no questions from recent testers, so the test has been distributed to the Regional Offices and the Texas Engineering Extension Service for examination administration. A copy of the Regional Office test administration schedule was provided. Mr. Franco noted that Computer Based Testing will also be available as an alternate testing location.

(e). Installer Licensing and Renewal. Ms. Garrett reported that 31 new applications for Installer licenses had been received since September 1, 2008. There are currently 182 licensed Installers. TCEQ recently sent all licensed installers an application package for the Irrigation Technician license.

(f). Irrigator Licensing, Training, Testing and Renewal. Ms. Garrett reported that there are currently 6,120 licensed Irrigators. This number is up slightly since the last Council meeting. There were 400 new applications received for Irrigator licenses.

(g). TCEQ Enforcement Actions. Ms. Garrett reported that the TCEQ had approved seven Administrative Orders for penalties in the amount of \$14,653 from September 1, 2008 through January 31, 2009. During the time period from September 1, 2008 through February 17, 2009, 18 Notices of Violation have been issued; three to licensed individuals and 14 to unlicensed individuals and one to a company. Eight Notices of Enforcement were issued during the same period. Six Notices of Enforcement were to unlicensed individuals and two to licensed individuals. Ms. Garrett noted that the two enforcement actions for licensed individuals were for failure to respond to a Notice of Violation and the first referral to enforcement for failure to obtain a permit before installing an irrigation system. Staff was asked to present the Enforcement summaries by Region in future meetings.

The Council meeting was adjourned for lunch at 11:30 a.m. The Council meeting resumed at 12:33 p.m.

(h). Status of IAC requests to EPA re. New Homes and Water Sense program. Ms. Garrett reported that she had several conversations with EPA to discuss the TCEQ licensing program. The issues of experience in landscape irrigation activities, the independent review of examination questions, and frequency of renewal of the license will continue to be discussed.

The Council discussed landscape irrigation activities across the state. Mr. Hubbard reported on activities in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Most areas have information in the permitting department to inform irrigators of ordinance requirements. Mr. Hubbard reported that about half of the areas have a permitting fee that is less than \$100 and about half have a fee greater than \$100. The range is \$25 to \$185. Mr. Hubbard reported that McKinney has a water conservation ordinance that restricts watering to two days a week year around. Overall, the feedback from irrigators is positive.

Chairman Goodwin reported that he is getting a great deal of communication from irrigators and for the most part, the feedback is positive. Chairman Goodwin reported that water conservation is cost effective.

Mr. Smolinski reported that the City of Mansfield does a plan review prior to the installation of an irrigation system. Each irrigation system is inspected. If a plan is submitted before noon, the approval can be obtained that day and an inspection conducted the following day. The city does not require open trenches for the inspection. Generally, the plan review takes less than an hour for a residential installation and an inspection for a residential installation takes about an hour. A

commercial installation inspection takes about two hours. Mr. Smolinski was asked how long the city keeps copies of irrigation plans. Mr. Smolinski stated that Mansfield retained the plan electronically indefinitely and could provide the plan to the irrigation system owner at a later date. Ms. Santo stated that the City of El Paso follows the state records retention policy: all commercial plans – permanent retention and residential home site plans for two years.

Chairman Goodwin reported that he recently attended the Water Conservation Workshops held in the Houston area that was well attended. The Sample Ordinance drafted by the Texas Municipal League has been a great help in implementing programs. Chairman Goodwin stated that it was encouraging to see cities working together to improve the quality of irrigation systems in their jurisdictions.

7. Receive, Discuss and Act on Committee Reports.

(a). Rules. The Rules Committee will be Chaired by Mr. Hubbard. Ms. Santo and Ms. Guz were also appointed to the committee. The need for being able to document water savings was discussed. Ms. Guz stated that it is difficult to evaluate savings because factors such as the weather or economy can impact how much water is used in irrigation. Ms. Guz recommended reviewing ways to address high pressure and irrigation system scheduling as effective methods to reduce water consumption. Ms. Guz recommended that the Council consider ways to educate home owners and irrigators to better schedule irrigation.

(b). Education. Mr. Hubbard will Chair the committee. Mr. Escobar and Mr. Tucker will serve on the committee. The committee will consider the need to develop a training curriculum for irrigation inspectors that may not have the basic irrigator's class, the 40 hour Backflow Prevention class and the Water Audit/Water Conservation requirements. The committee will also evaluate the standards for water audit and water conservation classes to ensure the new rule requirements are met.

(c). Water Conservation. Ms. Guz will Chair the committee. Ms. Mullarkey and Mr. Tucker are committee members.

(d). Legislative. Mr. Bell will Chair the committee. Ms. Guz and Ms. Mullarkey are also committee members.

(e) Presentations. Mr. Murr will Chair the committee. Ms. Santo and Mr. Escobar are committee members. The Committee will be responsible for recruiting future Council meeting presentations on emerging technology or other topics to educate the committee and staff.

(f). Tiered License Sub-Committee Report. A copy of the report was provided.

(f). Acceptable Topics for Irrigation CEUs. The item was discussed as part of item (b) above.

8. IAC report to TCEQ. Ms. Garrett stated that the report had been received.

9. Receive Discuss and Act on New Business and additional items of interest.

Chairman Goodwin noted that the Irrigation Association had presented information to the Environmental Protection Agency that the WaterSense Water Budget Calculator provided a water budget that was too high.

Future meetings dates are June 10 and November 18. The next two meetings will be at the same location.

Mr. Smolinski reported that the City of Mansfield had inspected ten double check backflow assembly devices that had been installed below ground and found that nine had not been properly maintained. Four of the devices were below water. There were possible health hazards associated with the poorly maintained devices. Mr. Smolinski expressed concern that the y-type strainer could introduce a higher degree of hazard.

Mr. Escobar reported that the City of Brownsville water desalination pilot project was a success, although the full-scale water desalination project will be postponed indefinitely due to cost.

10. Adjourn. Mr. Escobar moved and Mr. Murr seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting. Chairman Goodwin adjourned the meeting at 2:35.