

Irrigator Advisory Council (IAC) Draft Minutes

08/04/2022

Note: These draft minutes are posted for review and comment by meeting attendees. They will be available for comment at the next meeting of the Irrigator Advisory Council at which time they will be voted on for adoption.

Date: Thursday, August 4th, 2022

Time: 9:00am

Location: Microsoft Teams

Call to Order

Mark Warden

Introduction

Mr. Mark Warden called Meeting to order at 9:03a.m.

The present members of the council included: Mr. Mark Warden, Mr. Charles Swanson, Dr. Valerie Miller, Ms. Donna Starling, Mr. Mark Peterson, Mr. Jimmy Bergdorf, and Mr. James Garvin. Not in attendance was Mr. Robert Evans and Mr. David Moulton.

TCEQ individuals in attendance were Dr. Mingyuan Wei, Mr. Thomas Minucci, Ms. Jayme Martone, Ms. Katherine McGlaughlin, Mr. Paul Munguia, and Ms. Tamara Calhoun.

Mr. Mark Peterson requested that a correction be made to the May 5, 2022, IAC meeting minutes to correct "Mark (guest)" to "Mark P". A motion to approve the May 5, 2022, Irrigator Advisory Council meeting minutes with corrections was made and approved.

TCEQ Program Updates

Landscape Irrigation Program

Thomas Minucci

Mr. Thomas Minucci gave the investigation update. Since the IAC meeting in May, the TCEQ has received 11 new incidents and has approved 1 investigation. Four incidents have been closed. The most common complaints received pertained to allegations of individuals advertising without a license number and no licensed irrigator or technician on-site.

One of the IAC members had a concern regarding timeliness of calls from the public being responded to. Mr. Thomas Minucci responded that now that the landscape irrigation program is back to being fully staffed, all emails and phone calls are being responded to in a timely manner.

Cross-connection Control

Katherine McGlaughlin

Ms. Katherine McGlaughlin, TCEQ Cross-Connection Control Program (CCCP), provided an update on the activities of this program:

- The next Cross-Connection Control subcommittee meeting is scheduled for September 8th, 2022.
- The TCEQ CCCP has new staff joining the team starting next week, who will be introduced at the next subcommittee meeting.
- The CCCP staff will be doing a presentation at the TCEQ Public Drinking Water Conference which takes place August 9-10, 2022, on a backflow prevention program.

Occupational Licensing

Paul Munguia

Mr. Paul Mengulia, Occupational Licensing Team, provided statistics on pass fail rates and licenses issued after the IAC Meeting concluded:

Fiscal Year 2022 Landscape Irrigator Program Results 3rd Quarter (March 1, 2022 – May 31, 2022)

	New Applications Received	Renewal Applications Received	Total Applications Received	Tests Administered	Tests Passed	Percent Passed	New Licenses Issued	Renewal Licenses Issued	Total Current Licenses
Landscape Irrigation Inspector	1	8	9	0	0	0.00%	0	5	74
Landscape Irrigation Technician	110	134	244	146	61	41.8%	62	144	1,356
Landscape Irrigator	245	569	814	278	178	64.0%	94	524	6,695
Grand Totals:	356	711	1,067	424	239	n/a	156	673	8,125

*As of November 1, 2021, Occupational Licensing can no longer separate out Spanish versus English exams.

Mr. Paul Mengulia informed the council that occupational licensing is in the process of replacing paper examinations with computer-based licensing exams, with exceptions including ADA requirements. The licensing exams are still provided through TEEEX. Mr. Mengulia also informed the council that the Irrigation Licensing exam is planned to become paperless, but that Occupational Licensing will reach out to IAC and other subject matter experts for advice on the most effective means of creating a computer-based exam for Irrigation Licensing.

Ms. Tamara Calhoun gave a follow up on questions received in previous meetings about a lack of exams given in the West Texas area and told the council that TEEEX is open to adding more exams, however the current number of tests administered does not prompt them to add more sessions.

Mr. Charles Swanson asked the occupational licensing team about getting testing centers closer to cities like Lubbock and Amarillo because of the long distance needed to travel to existing testing centers in Mesquite and El Paso. Ms. Tamara Calhoun responded that TCEQ does not have the authority to add testing sites and encouraged individuals in those areas to reach out to TEEEX directly to request additional testing sites.

Ms. Donna Sterling asked for more detail on what the process for creating a computer-based exam for the Irrigator License will entail and whether there would be internal or external consultations on those changes being made. Mr. Paul Mengulia responded with information about how TCEQ will develop a survey internally to be sent out to all irrigators, as well as consult with the council for specific targets to be met. This data will be compiled in order for subject matter experts to be able to write the computer-based exam. Mr. Charles Swanson asked if it would be possible to create a hybrid test, where physical materials were provided in order to answer computer-based questions. Mr. Paul Mengulia responded that may be a possibility, but there are limitations with regard to the testing centers.

A brief discussion was held on the difference in the number of licensing tests passed and number of new licenses issued. Ms. Tamara Calhoun stated that this difference is because of the date on which the test was given; if a test is given at the very end of the financial quarter, the license will likely be issued at the beginning of the next quarter.

Discussion on work-group progress

Charles Swanson

Ms. Donna Sterling informed the IAC that a goals sheet had been created, which is ready for comments from the other council members on additions. The goal of this sheet is to elevate the quality of irrigation in the state of Texas, specifically how cities handle their certificate of occupancy inspections in relation to irrigation systems. Ms. Donna Sterling said that she thinks it is an enforcement issue, especially in smaller cities. Mr. Mark Ward agreed, stating that this has been an ongoing issue but getting cities on board is very difficult. Dr. Valerie Miller also agreed and added that she would like to see more input from different sized municipalities on what support needs are.

Mr. Charles Swanson spoke to the IAC about the Hiring Licensed Professional documents. The workgroup has created three (3) documents, targeting each of the following groups: homeowners, property managers/HOAs, and new construction/builders. Those documents have been shared with the council with the end goal of these documents being turned into the TCOT team in order to format and get additional input by the next IAC meeting. Mr. Charles Swanson stated that the goal was to make a short, simple one page fact sheet document, that could possibly be turned into a trifold, in order to distribute to a specific group. Ms. Donna Sterling said she thought it was very thorough and agreed that the format good. Mr. Charles Swanson added that it is important to have specific documents for specific groups and that in the future other documents could be added in the same format targeting additional audiences, such as municipalities.

New Business

Thomas Minucci

IAC Nominations

Mr. Thomas Minucci reminded the council that the process for nominations will begin in September. Mr. Charles Swanson asked when the nominations will be opened. Dr. Mingyuan Wei stated that the process for nominations will begin in September and nominations will begin to be accepted in October. Mr. Charles Swanson asked how many irrigator positions are coming up and how many public positions. Mr. Mingyuan Wei informed the council that three (3) irrigator positions and one (1) public position are set to expire in February 2023. A discussion was had on why there are four (4) members cycling out, instead of three (3), and it was concluded that someone in the past did not serve a full six (6) year term length.

Mr. Charles Swanson asked which areas of the state are going to continue to be represented and which are cycling out because it is important to try to keep equal representation among regions. Mr. Mark Warden stated that the central Texas area will be losing representation and that the Lubbock and Amarillo regions are coming up more often, that it may be beneficial to have someone from those regions to bridge the gap between Dallas and El Paso. Mr. Charles Swanson agreed.

Education and Outreach Opportunities

Mr. Thomas Minucci informed the council that one of the focuses is to increase the number of outreach and educational events the Landscape Irrigation Program attends and giving out information on topics like how to get licensed, information about hiring licensed irrigators, and information about responsibilities and requirements of irrigators. Mr. Thomas Minucci invited the council and meeting attendees to reach out to LIP with any upcoming events.

Mr. Mark Peterson stated that his staff wanted to thank the TCEQ for having the educational event next week, where they will have the opportunity to get continuing education units and suggested the LIP not only attend large events but look for smaller ones online too.

Dr. Mingyuan Wei informed the council that a list of events is being made and updated periodically and also said that materials for displays are in the process of being made.

Individuals wishing to address the council

Mr. Josh (guest) asked if the general public or a customer is already aware that a licensed irrigator is required, how would they go about finding an irrigator. Mr. Charles Swanson answered that on the TCEQ website it is possible to search for licensed irrigators in their city, county, or zip code and irrigation associations have lists of their members on their websites.

[TCEQ Search Licensing or Registration Information \(texas.gov\)](https://www2.tceq.texas.gov/lic_dpa/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.home)

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Ms. Donna Sterling asked when the council will be able to meet in-person again. Dr. Mingyuan Wei responded that we expect to be back in-person for the next council meeting, but that we will need to get TCEQ approval. Ms. Donna Sterling asked if it was possible to change the format of the council meeting to include a more informal working session, in order to get more work done during this time. Mr. Charles Swanson reminded that the whole council cannot meet without being a public meeting. Ms. Donna Sterling suggested advertising the first hour as working session, open to the public, before the formal IAC meeting. Mr. Mark Warden agreed that they are more productive meeting in-person, and it would be positive to get everyone together in one room again.

Ms. Tammy Swor, Executive Director for the TXIA, wanted to thank the council for the education from the workgroups related to the Hiring Professionals information. Ms. Tammy Swor wanted to encourage that work and let the council know when TXIA sends out information online they always get lots of responses.

Mr. Charles Swanson commented that it was good to see the staff all on one screen and asked if TCEQ is back in office full time. Mr. Thomas Minucci responded that TCEQ is still on a hybrid schedule, with some work in-office and some work-at-home.

Adjourn

Mr. Mark Warden made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Charles Swanson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 9:55am.