

Irrigator Advisory Council Minutes

Date: Thursday, November 4, 2021

Time: 9:00am

Location: Due to COVID-19, this meeting was held remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Call to Order

Charles Swanson, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order. Other members present were David Moulton, Jimmy Bergdorf, Valerie Miller, James Garvin, Donna Starling, and Bobby Evans. Mark Warden, IAC Chairperson, and Mark Peterson attended the meeting late.

TCEQ individuals in attendance were Chelsea Atkinson, Kenny Smith, Marilyn Gates, Tamara Calhoun, Charlie Middleton, Harley Hobson, Peter Reitmeyer, Alyssa Loveday, Rebecca Moore, and Brian Matthews.

A motion to approve the August 5, 2021 Irrigator Advisory Council meeting minutes was made by Bobby Evans. seconded by James Garvin. All in attendance approved.

TCEQ Program Updates:

Chelsea gave investigation update. Since the IAC meeting in August, the TCEQ has received 10 new incidents, and has approved 18 investigations. 8 incidents have been closed. The most common complaints received pertained to individuals advertising without listing a valid irrigator's license.

Charles Swanson asked for comment on who is program lead. Kenny Smith informed Mr. Swanson and the council that Marilyn would be standing in for Shannon until someone new is hired.

- **Charles Middleton gave a briefing on Cross-Connection Control updates.**

The Cross Connection Control Program was previously under response development capacity team, there was a reorganization – part of Texas Optimization Response Team under emergency preparedness

Mr. Garvin asked whether a completed incident report from Corpus Christi has been released.

Mr. Middleton noted that the incident report may be covered in the December 2nd, 2021 Cross Connection Control meeting.

Mr. Garvin inquired about a splashpad without a backflow. Mr. Middleton stated that the incident was in Arlington, Texas and that he believes it is still under investigation.

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- **Tamara Calhoun gave a briefing on Occupational Licensing updates.**

Regional Offices have resumed paper exams. Instead of being offered monthly, they are being offered quarterly. With onset of COVID, people have preferred CBT and have not come to regional offices as much for paper exams.

As of November 3rd, 2021, the irrigation technician exam is now available in Spanish via CBT. System is limited on what we can do, and we can't have two separate exams for the same license type (i.e., 2 in English and 4 in Spanish). Licensing combined the exams. Ms. Calhoun gave a demo on how the Irrigation Technician exam would look and work for Spanish test takers.

Tamara Calhoun stated that the Class D Wastewater and Wastewater Operator exams had already been translated to Spanish, and that the Licensing Division had planned to translate all exams into Spanish.

Charles Swanson provided an update on testing centers. He spoke with the individual responsible for facilitating exams in TEEEX – there currently is no facility available in the Lubbock and El Paso regions. TEEEX does have an agreement to use USDA facility for exams, but per federal guidelines, non-governmental entities are not allowed onto the property. In the past, TEEEX has had agreements with West Texas A&M to reserve/use facilities. The individual said he will reach out to them to see about scheduling irrigator exams after first of the year. As far as Lubbock facility, they are limited by federal guidelines. Charles Swanson said he will explore alternative locations, see if locations can be arranged after first of year.

Tamara notified the council that OLRD is still finalizing the transition from temporary to permanent approval of online courses. Additionally, she notified the council that several staff members from OLRD took part in reviewing Spanish translations for exams.

Vote on IAC action items:

- Topic suggestions included
 - Review of TCEQ videos and potential updates, TCOT
 - Working with utility companies/districts
 - Outreach and Education with a focus on water conservation
 - Homeowners' education on irrigation systems/requirements

The council discussed splitting into two separate workgroups, with the intention of meeting between November and the next IAC meeting in February 2022. The intention is to develop goals and objectives so they may be presented at the February meeting.

The council decided that the Public Relations workgroups would be as follows:

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Homeowners/hired license –

Charles Swanson, Mark Peterson, Donna Starling, Valerie Miller, James Garvin

Charles Coordinating

Inspection -

Bobby Evans, Jimmy Bergdorf, David Moulton, Mark Warden

Donna Starling will coordinate on inspection side

Freeze Preparation Discussion:

Mark Peterson - what happened and what was being done in response to freezing events? Are there any programs or problems that you are seeing out there? If so, what are the specific needs you're addressing? If so, what are those needs? Trying to get more info on what you are seeing.

David Moulton – in Mansfield, all DCVAs must be installed above grade. It's up to irrigator to freeze protect it. Some irrigators are wrapping the meter box and valve with a bag and weighing them down with rocks. They recommend mounding mulch on the exterior of the bag to keep cold air/wind away from the equipment.

James Garvin – technicians have seen that not only did backflow freeze, but we also because of deep freeze, had isolation valves and station valves that froze. He understands laterals can be 6 inches, but valves and isolation valves – have to go back to plumbing codes and have to get them to 12 inches.

Charles Swanson – in college station research field – PVB was wrapped, turned off valves of PVB and split valves. The backflow didn't get damaged, but water got trapped in the valve and split the brass valves.

James Bergdorf – in FW area, backflows had less than one percent failure, but most of them were in buildings when power went out.

James Garvin- New Braunfels dealt with pressure deficits. Once leaks were fixed, there were issues filling tanks. Irrigation valves were busted. Closed businesses had fire lines breaking and were not available to inspect.

Donna Starling – her local municipality has a schedule: starting November 1 and ending April 1, they prefer people to not irrigate at night due to potential for ice in cold weather. Turn irrigation systems off for most part, if yard is dormant, don't oversee. Don't have any need to turn irrigation system on until end of March/end of April. If DCVA turned off and system drained, you won't have system burst.

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TCEQ Final Inspection Checklist Discussion:

Charles Swanson- The document is thorough, thinks it could be worded differently. This goes back to workgroup discussion – are inspections thorough enough? Does not know what inspectors are doing when they go out, or whether they're doing a full inspection according to rules. May depend on whether Irrigator Inspector or Building Inspector. Opens to comments from Council.

James Garvin- Some building officials pawn responsibility for protecting the water on the public water supply and utility district. The Plumbing code only requires checking for a backflow, nothing more. More groups need to adopt Chapter 344.

Kenny Smith- There is a TCEQ workgroup looking into Cities that meet the 20,000-population requirement. Do they use the provided template? Is there a designated irrigation inspector? There is a possibility of a survey being created to answer these questions.

Charles Swanson- It's good to catch the rapidly growing communities before they get too big and implement the rules from the start.

New Business:

➤ Leak Detection Strategies

Valerie Miller – suggested a device called the flume attaches to meter. Based on tech it can tell you size of the leak and has outdoor abilities. A lot of utilities are rebating up to half of this product that you can buy on amazon. This is just for property not site leak detection. Does not pinpoint the leak but can confirm if one exists.

James Garvin- Leak detection is out there, but it is not cost affective. Sometimes it just takes time for the leak to present itself in a manner in which you can identify.

Charles Swanson – advanced metering technology helps show whether it's to the meter or to the home. If you see leak indicator, you know you can look in the yard. If it's in the yard, it gets complicated quick because it only leaks when something operates. When water is being thrown at you, the sound is different on acoustic detection equipment. If it is in irrigation system, check each valve. If it's in the main line, turn off system, wait until a drought, and find the green spot.

Mark Peterson - SAWS recommends isolation valves in as many places to help with the old school method of identifying where you may have to start digging.

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Proposed New Meeting Dates:

Proposed 2022 First Quarter- February 3, 2022

Proposed 2022 Second Quarter- May 5, 2022

Proposed 2022 Third Quarter- August 4, 2022

Proposed 2022 Fourth Quarter- November 3, 2022

General consensus that the proposed dates will work.

The council adopts the aforementioned dates for 2022's IAC meetings.

Individuals wishing to address the council

Chad Touchet; insulated backflow bag.com. –Proposed something similar to the Wise Guys program that started about 15 years ago, says many municipalities use them. Mr. Touchet added that the program was started by Doug Goodwin, and was designed to keep homeowners informed as well as developers.

James Garvin- Proposes that we invite Wise Guys to give a presentation at an IAC meeting. Possibly other educational demos at future meetings.

Blake Brosig- Proposes pamphlet materials for new homeowners regarding their irrigation systems and what to expect if under Chapter 344 regulation.

Motion to adjourn

Motion to adjourn by James Garvin. Seconded by Valerie Miller. Meeting adjourned at 11:27 AM.

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