

1/17/08
Time Start: 1:30 pm
Time Stop: 2:15 pm

Teleconference Call:

Work Group 5 ~ The Council shall conduct a study to evaluate the desirability of requiring the Board to:

1. *Designate as certified water conservation training facilities entities and programs that provide assistance to retail public utilities in developing water conservation plans under Section 13.146; and*
2. *Give preference to certified water conservation training facilities in making loans or grants for water conservation training and education activities.*

Council & Other Participants

Spokesperson Bill Hoffman

Nora Mullarkey
Gary Walker
C.E. Williams
Scott Swanson
Comer Tuck

TWDB Staff

Aung Hla
John Sutton
Laila Johnson
Vanessa Escobar

Spokesperson Bill Hoffman called the meeting to order at 1:30 and began by briefly reviewing the charge for this workgroup. It was also discussed that the history behind this statute originates from a facility out of El Paso that is tied in with the desalination plant. At one point in time the facility had applied for grants from the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) for which there were no grants of that type available. The workgroup read the statute aloud to determine the intent of the charge. After reviewing the exact wording of the legislation, it was discussed that the interpretation of the text intends to give preference to the “training facility”, if they are certified, in the event that they apply for a grant from the TWDB.

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Someone shared that it would be a good idea to keep in mind the following questions when deciding how to approach the charge:

- Do these facilities provide a useful service?
- Is this something that we want to promote if the intent of this is to encourage other people to build a facility because they may receive funding?
- Is this a type a project the Board should be funding?

A question was asked about whether there were any funds to travel to and visit facilities. A comment was made that Board staff probably could travel as part of their duties, or a volunteer of the Water Conservation Advisory Council could. It was suggested that maybe there needs to be a volunteer call up a representative at the El Paso Utility Board or contact someone running that particular facility.

The question was raised if the focus of this workgroup's charge is on facilities or the training. An example was shared that there are a lot of natural science centers around the state that may teach about habitats and nature in addition to conservation. The question was raised if we should define what it means by training and facilities. It was expressed that this is an area that could use a little more clarification.

It was suggested that perhaps the following questions should be preliminary questions to guide this workgroup in their charge:

- Is it good to have training facilities out there?
- Should the board certify facilities?
- Do any pre existing facilities have an unfair advantage?

Someone suggested that the first thing that needs to be done is evaluate if there is a need for this kind of training, and what needs to be done to investigate that? Right now the TWDB provides a service of giving workshops and providing guidance on developing water conservation plans. However there is a growing need for more of this type of training for water conservation professionals. Perhaps there should be a survey to find out what is needed and how interested people are in having this type of resource.

In response it was agreed that there is a need to focus on whether or not there is a true need for additional water conservation training programs. Answer that question first. If there were established training programs, it would prove more feasible to provide the training at available regional facilities that already exist. This would remove the focus from certifying facilities and shift it more toward certifying programs. The main interest of this is to train retail public utilities that are developing water conservation plans.

In the discussion it was stated that, the bottom line is that this piece of legislation is talking about facilities. There was question as to whether the intent of the legislation was to have the term "facilities" be interchangeable with "program". Some workgroup members stated that they felt that the intent of the statute referred to facilities only. With that underlying intention there was some question as to how one would evaluate facilities? How would one rank facilities? How many facilities are there? How do you define a facility or what exactly constitutes a facility?

It was suggested that it might be necessary to recheck the true intent of the bill, as opposed to assuming it means only facilities. If the true intent is to advance training and education, then the TWDB giving preference to facilities just because they are a facility does not seem to accomplish the true intention of the statute. Someone commented that the legislation does indeed specifically say "facilities" and it originated out of El Paso.

A question was asked if this workgroup could make a recommendation to the council stating that, "We don't think it is appropriate to give one particular facility preference over another mainly due to distance and proximity of facility location." Someone stated that "I would vote that there should not be given any preference to any particular facility anywhere in Texas, because of the size of Texas." It was suggested that at this time it may not be appropriate to make any recommendations to the Council.

It was suggested that a more diligent effort is going to have to be put forth, and that the workgroup could start by having a representative visit the El Paso facility in June. Someone commented that as a workgroup, we should be looking at programs not facilities. The only way we could ever give preference to a facility is to know what programs every facility has and that means the programs themselves need to be evaluated. C.E. Williams offered to give a follow up review about the El Paso facility in June 2008.

It was suggested that there has to be a criteria to meet in order for a facility, entity, or program, to be eligible to apply for funding or assistance from the TWDB. The type of assistance could vary also, in that perhaps providing materials and speakers would be part of the assistance. The TWDB should also be able to certify the training providers.

The question was raised if there is any way we could come up with a number of facilities, entities, and programs that have done water conservation training for retail public utilities in the year of 2007? It was agreed that the TWDB and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) could compile a list of workshops that they held in 2007 and provide it by next workgroup meeting. Wholesalers may also have held training events.

It was suggested that maybe Mike Howe could put something in Texas Water Newsletter and or that the workgroup could get something in other newsletters. It would be a section in the newsletter asking to let the Council know that if you have a training program, please let us know by going to a link.

Someone stated that this workgroup's focus of recommendation may be end up being geared more towards not in favor of certifying training facilities, but rather certifying training programs.

The workgroup agreed to touch base at 1/30/08 meeting, have another teleconference in March 2008, and someone would do a site visit in June at El Paso.

Immediate Actions	Long Term Actions
Compile a list of trainings that were provided in 2007 by TCEQ, TWDB, and Wholesalers across the state.	Develop a link online where people can share information on the types of training or guidance they provided for retail public utilities on the topic of water conservation plans.
	Develop a brief notice to print in newsletters. The notice will request information on training or guidance provided for retail public utilities on the topic of water conservation plans.