



Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

November 19, 1998

Mr. David R. Gipson
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 12847
Austin, Texas 78711

OR98-2767

Dear Mr. Gipson:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Texas Open Records Act (the "act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 119742. Your office has assigned this request tracking number TDA-OR-98 0043.

The Texas Department of Agriculture (the "department") received a request for a certain specified "investigation report" concerning Incident No. 2424-03-98-0028. In response to the request, you submit to this office for review the information at issue. You claim that information responsive to the request, submitted as Exhibit B, is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.¹

To show that section 552.103(a) is applicable, the department must demonstrate that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.--Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). Contested cases conducted under the Administrative Procedure Act, chapter 2001 of the Government Code, are considered litigation under section 552.103. Open Records Decision No. 588 at 7 (1991). Section 552.103 requires concrete evidence that litigation may ensue. To demonstrate that litigation is reasonably anticipated, the department must furnish evidence that litigation is realistically contemplated and is more than mere conjecture. Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986).

¹You have also submitted to this office information that apparently was sent for informational purposes only. In this ruling, we do not address the public disclosure of that information.

The department is authorized to investigate pesticide-related complaints and may assess penalties for violations of chapter 76 of the Agriculture Code. Agric. Code § 76.007(a). Proceedings conducted after assessment of a department penalty are subject to the Administrative Procedure Act. *Id.* at § 76.1555(h). In this instance, the department has supplied this office with information which shows that there is an ongoing investigation, and the department will take enforcement action as authorized by statute. We conclude that litigation is reasonably anticipated. We additionally find that the documents submitted by the department are related to the reasonably anticipated litigation for the purposes of section 552.103(a). The documents may, therefore, be withheld pursuant to section 552.103.

Generally, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the anticipated litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a), and it must be disclosed. We also note that the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

We are resolving this matter with an informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and should not be relied on as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have any questions regarding this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,


Sam Haddad
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SH/mjc

Ref.: ID# 119742

Enclosures: Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Robert L. Burnside
P. O. Box 646
Manvel, Texas 77578
(w/o enclosures)