



August 3, 2000

Ms. Elizabeth P. West  
Senior Personnel Attorney  
General Law Division  
Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission  
P.O. Box 13087  
Austin, Texas 78711-3087

OR2000-2949

Dear Ms. West:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 137681.

The Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (the "commission") received a request for all information related to the posting, interviewing, justification for hire and hiring of the Air Section Manager position. You state that you have released information to the requestor. You claim that interview questions and answers are excepted from disclosure under section 552.122 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You assert that section 552.122(b) of the Government Code excepts interview questions, model answers, responses and the interviewers handwritten notes. Although you assert that all of the interview questions and answers are excepted, you make specific reference to questions 1-3, 7, 11, 21, and 22. Section 552.122(b) excepts from disclosure test items developed by a licensing agency or governmental body. In Open Records Decision No. 626 (1994), this office determined that the term "test item" in section 552.122 includes any standard means by which the knowledge or ability of an individual or group in a particular area is evaluated, but does not encompass evaluations of an employee's overall job performance or suitability. Whether information falls within the section 552.122 exception must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 626 at 6 (1994).

After reviewing the submitted information, we conclude that interview questions 1-3, 7, 11, 21, and 22 evaluate the knowledge or ability of an individual or a group in a particular area and may be withheld as "test items" under section 552.122(b). Because the answers tend to reveal the questions, the department may also withhold the model answers and actual responses to interview questions 1-3, 7, 11, 21, and 22 under section 552.122(b). However, we conclude that the remaining questions and answers evaluate the candidate's overall suitability for the position rather than his or her knowledge or ability to perform the assigned work. Therefore, you must release the remaining information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

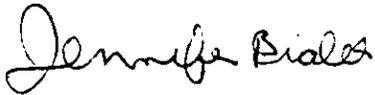
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for

contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Bialek  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JHB\er

Ref: ID# 137681

Encl: Submitted documents

cc: Ms. Alice Cone  
16033 Windsor Road  
Gardendale, Texas 79758  
(w/o enclosures)