



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

March 28, 2013

Ms. Kathleen Decker  
Director  
Litigation Division  
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
P.O. Box 13087  
Austin, Texas 78711-3087

OR2013-05020

Dear Ms. Decker:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 482481 (TCEQ PIR No. 10836).

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (the "commission") received a request for information related to STEERS incident number 134562 at BP Products, RN 102535077, including all root cause investigations and reports and any monitoring and modeling reports. You state you have released some information to the requestor. You state the submitted information may be excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. You also claim release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of BP Products North America, Inc. ("BP"). Accordingly, you notified BP of the request and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d) (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permitted governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure under the circumstances). We have received comments from a representative of BP. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't

Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information made confidential by other statutes, such as section 382.041 of the Health and Safety Code, which provides in part “a member, employee, or agent of the commission may not disclose information submitted to the commission relating to secret processes or methods of manufacture or production that is identified as confidential when submitted.” Health & Safety Code § 382.041(a). This office has concluded section 382.041 protects information that is submitted to the commission if a *prima facie* case is established the information constitutes a trade secret under the definition set forth in the Restatement of Torts and if the submitting party identified the information as being confidential when submitting it to the commission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 652 (1997). The commission states BP marked the submitted information as confidential when it provided it to the commission.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the submitted information is confidential under section 382.041 to the extent this information constitutes a trade secret. BP argues the submitted information is confidential under section 552.110 of the Government Code. Because section 552.110(a) also protects trade secrets from disclosure, we will consider the submitted arguments under section 382.041 of the Health and Safety Code together with the submitted arguments under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code.

Section 552.110(a) of the Government Code protects trade secrets obtained from a person that are privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision. Gov’t Code § 552.110(a). The Texas Supreme Court has adopted the definition of a “trade secret” from section 757 of the Restatement of Torts, which holds a “trade secret” to be

any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one’s business, and which gives him an opportunity to obtain an advantage over competitors who do not know or use it. It may be a formula for a chemical compound, a process of manufacturing, treating or preserving materials, a pattern for a machine or other device, or a list of customers. It differs from other secret information in a business . . . in that it is not simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business . . . . A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business. . . . It may . . . relate to the sale of goods or to other operations in the business, such as a code for determining discounts, rebates or other concessions in a price list or catalogue, or a list of specialized customers, or a method of bookkeeping or other office management.

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<sup>1</sup>We note information is ordinarily not confidential under the Act simply because the party submitting the information anticipates or requests that it be kept confidential. *See Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 677 (Tex. 1976). In other words, a governmental body cannot, through an agreement or contract, overrule or repeal provisions of the Act. *See* Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987); Open Records Decision Nos. 541 at 3 (1990) (“[T]he obligations of a governmental body under [the Act] cannot be compromised simply by its decision to enter into a contract.”), 203 at 1 (1978) (mere expectation of confidentiality by person supplying information does not satisfy requirements of statutory predecessor to section 552.110).

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763, 776 (Tex. 1958). This office will accept a private person's claim for exception as valid under section 552.110(a) if that person establishes a *prima facie* case for the exception, and no one submits an argument that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. *See* Open Records Decision No. 552 at 5 (1990). However, we cannot conclude section 552.110(a) is applicable unless it has been shown the information meets the definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim.<sup>2</sup> Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983).

BP argues the entire Flare Root Cause Report constitutes a trade secret under section 552.110(a). Upon review of BP's arguments, we conclude BP has made a *prima facie* case demonstrating that the information we have marked constitutes trade secrets. Accordingly, the commission must generally withhold this information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 382.041 of the Health and Safety Code and section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. However, we note that under the federal Clean Air Act, emission data must be made available to the public, even if the data otherwise qualifies as trade secret information. *See* 42 U.S.C. 7414(c). We note that emission data is only subject to the release provision in section 7414(c) of title 42 of the United States Code if it was collected pursuant to subsection (a) of that section. *See id.* Thus, to the extent any of the marked information constitutes emissions data for the purposes of section 7414(c) of title 42 of the United States Code, the commission must release such information in accordance with federal law. However, we find BP has failed to show how the remaining information at issue meets the definition of a trade secret, nor has it demonstrated the necessary factors to establish a trade secret claim. Accordingly, none of this information may be withheld under section 552.110(a) of the Government Code.

Section 552.137 excepts from disclosure "an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body" unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type

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<sup>2</sup>The Restatement of Torts lists the following six factors as indicia of whether information constitutes a trade secret:

- (1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company];
- (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and others involved in [the company's] business;
- (3) the extent of measures taken by [the company] to guard the secrecy of the information;
- (4) the value of the information to [the company] and [its] competitors;
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing the information;
- (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 319 at 2 (1982), 306 at 2 (1982), 255 at 2 (1980).

specifically excluded by subsection (c).<sup>3</sup> See Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). The e-mail address at issue is not excluded by subsection (c). Therefore, the commission must withhold the personal e-mail address we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner affirmatively consents to its public disclosure.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, the commission must generally withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 382.041 of the Health and Safety Code and section 552.110(a) of the Government Code. However, to the extent any of the marked information constitutes emissions data for the purposes of section 7414(c) of title 42 of the United States Code, the commission must release such information in accordance with federal law. The commission must withhold the e-mail address we have marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner has consented to its release. The remaining information must be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index\\_orl.php](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php), or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Thana Hussaini  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

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<sup>3</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. See Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

<sup>4</sup>Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009) is a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold ten categories of information, including e-mail addresses of members of the public under section 552.137 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

Ref: ID# 482481

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

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(w/o enclosures)