



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 30, 2014

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

OR2014-11153

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# 527459 (TCEQ PIR No. 14-16130-PIR).

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (the "commission") received a request for all complaints made against a specified facility, including the names and addresses of the complainants. You inform us you have released some of the requested information. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.137 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

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. Section 552.101 encompasses the common-law informer's privilege, which Texas courts have long recognized. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim.

¹We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

App. 1969). The informer's privilege protects the identities of persons who report activities over which the governmental body has criminal or quasi-criminal law-enforcement authority, provided the subject of the information does not already know the informer's identity. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 515 at 3 (1998), 208 at 1-2 (1978). The privilege protects the identities of individuals who report violations of statutes to the police or similar law-enforcement agencies, as well as those who report violations of statutes with civil or criminal penalties to "administrative officials having a duty of inspection or of law enforcement within their particular spheres." *See* Open Records Decision No. 279 at 2 (1981) (citing 8 John H. Wigmore, *Evidence in Trials at Common Law*, § 2374, at 767 (J. McNaughton rev. ed. 1961)). The report must involve a violation of a criminal or civil statute. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 582 at 2 (1990), 515 at 4-5. The privilege excepts the informer's statement only to the extent necessary to protect the informer's identity. *See* Open Records Decision No. 549 at 5 (1990).

You argue the information you have highlighted reveals the identities of individuals who filed complaints with the commission alleging violations of state environmental laws and regulations. You explain the commission has authority to enforce these laws and regulations under sections 5.013 and 7.002 of the Water Code. *See* Water Code §§ 5.013, 7.002. You further state there are administrative and civil penalties for violation of the relevant laws. Additionally, there is no indication the subject of the complaint is aware of the identities of the complainants. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we find the commission may withhold the information we have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law informer's privilege.² However, we find the remaining information you have highlighted does not reveal the identity of an informer for purposes of the informer's privilege. Accordingly, the commission may not withhold any of the remaining information at issue under section 552.101 of the Government Code on that basis. As you raise no further exceptions to disclosure, the commission must release the remaining information.

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for

²As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure of this information.

providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee Seidlits", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lee Seidlits
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CLS/tch

Ref: ID# 527459

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)