



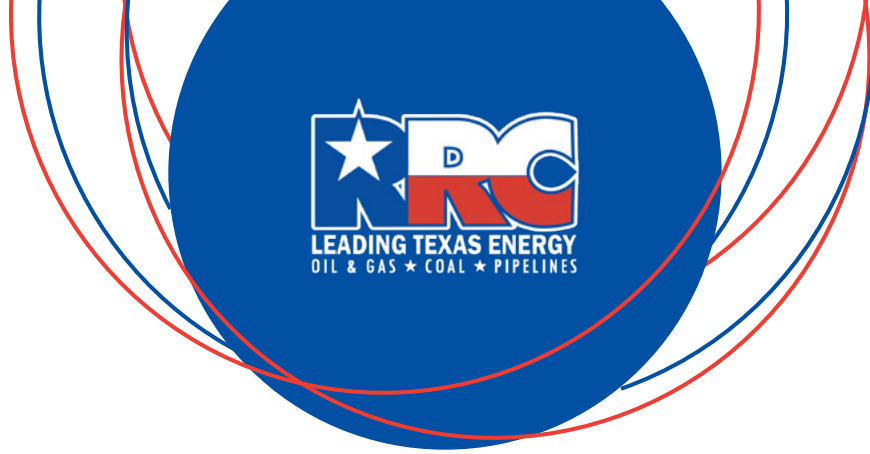
November 2020

Energy News

From the Field Photo

Sunrise From the Front Porch

Photo by Kevin Clarke



- P. 3** **New Application Takes Aim at Further Reducing Flaring**

- P. 5** **The Online Way:** *Pandemic Does Not Prevent Railroad Commission from Delivering Much-Needed Training to Regulated Community*

- P. 7** **Planning for Next Phase of Alternative Fuels Safety Training Program Put Agency in Good Position When Pandemic Struck**

- P. 9** **Site Planned for Military Veterans a Candidate for RRC's Brownfields Program**

- P. 11** **TCEQ Accepting Comments, to Hold Public Hearing on Oil and Gas Air Permits**

- P. 12** **Commissioners' Corner**

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December 8, 2020

Online

Austin, TX

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New Application Takes Aim at Further Reducing Flaring

Commissioners for the Railroad Commission recently made significant progress on reducing flaring from oil and gas sites in the state.

On Nov. 4, commissioners approved a revamped *Form R-32, Application for Exception to Statewide Rule 32*, which had previously been titled *Statewide Rule 32 Exception Data Sheet* and will be used by oil and gas operators to apply for an exception to flare gas during oil and gas operations. The form provides specific guidance on when an exception to flare would be permissible, under which circumstances, and for how long.

The commissioners' action made changes to the application for flaring exceptions, not to the state's flaring rule (Statewide Rule 32). On Aug. 4, commissioners voted to publish a proposed version of the application for public comment. RRC staff received and considered 26 sets of comments from individuals, operating companies, industry associations, trade groups, and nongovernmental organizations.

Based on the public comments received, changes were made to how information was organized on the proposed form and improved instructions, while maintaining key data that the Railroad Commission will receive from oil and gas operators as proposed in August. *Form R-32* will:

- In many cases, reduce the period of time an operator may obtain an administrative exception to flare gas. For certain exceptions, the duration may be reduced by 50% to 80%.
- Provide incentives for operators to use technologies to reduce the amount of gas flared.
- Require operators to submit more specific information to justify the need to flare or vent gas in accordance with Commission rules.
- Provide additional key datapoints to facilitate compliance audits with reported production.



“Wednesday’s approval of the newly revised *Form R-32* is a great step forward for the energy industry in Texas,” said RRC Chairman Christi Craddick. “I am thankful for Commissioner Christian’s leadership on this effort and for the hardworking staff that made this successful.”

“Texans demand transparency and innovation from all levels of government,” said Commissioner Ryan Sitton, “and this form will help collect more accurate data as we assess the role of flaring and look for ways to reduce it going forward.”

“Texas has done a tremendous job reducing flaring this year, flaring less than a half a percent of gas produced in May 2020,” Commissioner Wayne Christian said. “This form change is a big and important step towards minimizing routine flaring in Texas, allowing our agency to collect the information it needs to better determine who is following the rules when it comes to flaring and who is not.”

Form R-32 will be part of the Commission’s development of a Rule 32 computer program, which will facilitate the online submission of flaring requests and provide the agency with a better mechanism for compliance audits and data analytics.

Until the Rule 32 program is online, which is targeted for the spring, operators will be able to use either the current application for exceptions to flaring or the new *Form R-32*.



The Online Way: Pandemic Does Not Prevent Railroad Commission from Delivering Much-Needed Training to Regulated Community

Railroad Commission did not let the COVID-19 pandemic hinder staff from fulfilling their critical mission of protecting public safety and the environment. When the coronavirus forced stay-at-home orders, the agency shifted gears and moved many of its training programs online.

In March, the agency's Alternative Fuels Safety Department began continuing education classes for individuals in the Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) industry. Almost 50 of those webinars have occurred to date with more than 800 students attending online. This month, the department added initial training classes and online exams, utilizing online tools and webcams, for LPG dispenser operator safety training.

"The safety rules individuals are learning through our remote continuing education webinars and training is invaluable because they are responsible for handling propane in retail and commercial services and in recreational and residential settings," said April Richardson, Alternative Fuels Safety Director. "Students have been providing feedback at the end of the online courses since the spring, which has helped us fine-tune our instruction as we kept adding classes."

Other RRC divisions also leveraged online resources. The agency's annual Regulatory Conference, which provides important updates and training to operators, was canceled because of COVID-19 but the RRC presented information industry operators through webinars. The webinars included sessions on a wide variety of topics



from new online filings to oil and gas waste stream management and had more than 2,800 people attend or view.

In August, the agency's Pipeline Safety Division had more than 700 people attend or view a webinar on new and amended rules concerning pipeline permits and pipeline safety regulations.

"The pandemic increased the urgency to adapt our operations to ensure our mission was not affected, and the web-based courses fit perfectly with our efforts. I am glad our agency was well-prepared and stepped up to the challenge," said Wei Wang, RRC Executive Director. "Industry training plays a critical role in ensuring compliance of the Railroad Commission's regulations, which in turn contributes to the safety of all Texans. We deployed these online resources expeditiously, which allowed us to be wherever operators are."

An added benefit of many of the webinars is the fact that they have been archived for viewing. In case they missed it the first time, operators can go to <https://www.rrc.state.tx.us/oil-gas/oil-gas-workshops-and-seminars/> to view any previous oil and gas regulatory webinars, and <https://rrc.texas.gov/pipeline-safety/pipeline-safety-rules-webinar/> for the August pipeline safety webinar.

VIEW OIL AND GAS WEBINARS ▶

VIEW PIPELINE SAFETY WEBINARS ▶

Also, information about Alternative Fuels training can be found via this page: <https://rrc.texas.gov/alternative-fuels/safety-licensing-training-and-certification/>

VIEW ALTERNATIVE FUELS TRAINING ▶





Planning for Next Phase of Alternative Fuels Safety Training Program Put Agency in Good Position When Pandemic Struck

Sometimes, emergencies completely blindside us; other times, we are ready for them.

Fortunately for the Railroad Commission, by the time COVID-19 pandemic forced stay-at-home orders in March, its Alternative Fuels Safety Division had already spent considerable time developing online training., which had yet to be rolled out.

“We were able to make lemonade out of lemons,” said Mark Hood, the AFS training manager. “The pandemic accelerated moving the program on-line.”

With more than 80,000 locations in the state handling propane or other liquefied petroleum gas, compressed natural gas, or liquefied natural gas, AFS training and certifications are critical in keeping people safe.

Texas is one of the stricter states in the country for training safety for alternative fuels. All states have incorporated National Fire Protection Association standards into their laws.

“Most states leave it at that,” Hood said. “We go beyond that. We and several other states have an

extra layer. We engage in our own training programs and a statewide certification program.”

Texas laws requiring training and certifications was initially in response to the tragic 1937 explosion of the New London School near Tyler that had used wellhead gas from oil wells to heat the school. The incident killed nearly 300 students and teachers.

The Railroad Commission currently requires 53 different examinations and certifications for the various LPG, CNG, and LNG fuels.

Before the pandemic and online courses, operators could get training one of two ways: They could come to Austin for a class, or they could go to one of the rotating remote locations that the instructors traveled to in their pickups loaded with class materials.

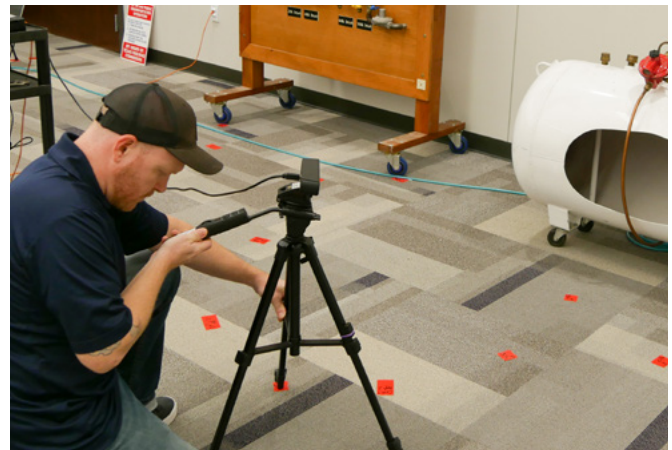
“We might get out to El Paso only once a quarter because it was so far,” Hood said. “It did not seem to me to be a very efficient program. I said we have to wrap up the Pony Express and learn to use the telegraph wire.”

As part of its move toward online training last year, AFS had fortunately already hired an instructor, Gretchen Almind, who specialized in online lessons. She worked diligently to convert print-based materials for the online environment.

The first class to go online in March was continuing education classes for liquefied petroleum gas dispenser operators, which must be completed every four years. Operators that fail to maintain certification must cease activities, so the class has great importance to industry.

Since the continuing education classes started in March, RRC has collected student feedback to find areas that might need improving. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, Hood said.

In the summer, in-person classes and examinations resumed in Austin, first at 25 percent capacity and then up to the current 50 percent. Travel for the AFS instructors is still prohibited, making online instruction critical to the mission.



On Oct. 19, AFS was able to conduct its first remote testing using a statewide contractor to allow people to conveniently complete their exams in a webcam-equipped room in their part of the state while still adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols.

And on Oct. 21, AFS added its first online version of initial 2.1. Dispenser Operations training, which covers the proper filling and handling of ASME motor/mobile fuel containers, appurtenances, DOT cylinders, and dispenser operations.

Online courses are here to stay, Hood said, but that does not mean in-person classes are going away. The challenge for AFS going forward, especially when the pandemic passes, is planning the right mix of in-person classes to online courses, which will depend on what's best for Texas.



Site Planned for Military Veterans a Candidate for RRC's Brownfields Program

Debra Christian and her family face potential challenges at their property near Tyler.

In the 1970s, an oil and gas operator set up operations on the property, a move later determined to be in bad faith in 2019 after years in court. The oil and gas operators left, but Christian isn't sure about the extent of what was left behind on the 1,000-plus-acre property.

"The land's been in my family for generations," she said. "It was given to my family right after the Civil War."

Christian and the nonprofit she founded, Community Residential Care Program, are working to build a home for military veterans on the land. CRC provides access to adult education courses and veteran housing arrangements.

But until the property has been assessed to ensure it is safe for residential redevelopment, the CRC's goal is at a standstill. Christian is a new applicant to the Railroad Commission's Brownfields Response Program, which will assess her land for any potential oil and gas contamination.

"This site is a perfect candidate for the program because, once complete, the property will no longer be a risk to human health or the environment, and the assistance offered by CRC will help facilitate job growth in the community by helping veterans return to the workforce," said Leslie Etzel, RRC's Brownfields Response Program Manager. "These two aspects of the project can also play a role in increasing tax revenue in the area. These are the fundamental components of a Brownfield project and what the RRC is looking for when accepting applications."

The Brownfields program, which is funded by grants from the Environmental Protection Agency, allows the RRC to assess and remediate abandoned oil and gas sites at no cost to the applicant.

Through the years, the Tyler property has become a living legacy for the Christian family, which is why they have fought for its protection.

"I wanted to turn it into my passion," Christian explained, "but wasn't sure how."

The Brownfields program is one of the first steps toward redevelopment of abandoned oil and gas sites. When applying for the program, applicants need a redevelopment plan that will benefit the community (e.g., Christian's housing for homeless veterans) and a property for redevelopment.

Once the Railroad Commission has completed its environmental assessment and cleanup, as needed, the applicant still has a long road ahead of them towards redevelopment. But RRC is always happy write letters of support for applicants seeking other state and federal grant funding.

The idea to help veterans came to Christian after her father and brother, both military veterans, passed away.

"I had not understood this mission until my dad got hurt," Christian said. "He fought three wars and he lost both legs. With that I began to understand the gap between services."

Since her mission began, the Community Residential Care Program has been helping veterans from five surrounding communities by driving back and forth to a Veterans Affairs hospital.

Currently, Christian is transforming her house into a transition home for homeless war veterans. With three additional units attached to her house, she intends to expand CRC with the Brownfield property, which will be used to build tiny homes and three-bedroom houses and has further plans to develop more extensive affordable housing down the road.

"When you grow up seeing your dad in that green uniform all your life, this is just what you do," Christian said. "You find a need, you fulfill it, and do the best you can with it."

"You find a need, you fulfill it, and do the best you can with it."

- Debra Christian



TCEQ Accepting Comments, to Hold Public Hearing on Oil and Gas Air Permits

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality also has a regulatory role in the oil and gas industry, particularly related to emissions. That agency is accepting public comment and will hold a public hearing on draft oil and gas general operating air permits (Nos. 511-514). The draft permits contain revisions based on recent federal rule changes.

Comments may be submitted to Melanie Nelon, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Air Permits Division, MC 163, P.O. Box 13087, Austin, TX 78711-3087, or emailed to melanie.nelon@tceq.texas.gov. All comments should reference GOPs 511-514. The written comment period ends on Dec. 16.

TCEQ will hold a public hearing on Dec. 11 at 10 a.m. by conference call. To listen or participate, dial 1-877-820-7831 and enter passcode 721683# (International: 1-720-279-0026) during the hearing's scheduled time.

For more information, go to https://www.tceq.texas.gov/permitting/air/nav/titlev_news.html.

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Chairman Craddick

COMMISSIONERS' CORNER



November was an exciting month for the Railroad Commission of Texas. At our open conference, Commissioners unanimously adopted the new Form R-32. This data sheet is a great step forward and will allow the Commission to collect important information related to flaring in Texas. I sincerely appreciate the leadership of Commissioner Christian and staff, and the hard-working industry and stakeholder groups who all made this possible.

Additionally, election night brought a new Commissioner to the Railroad Commission of Texas. I will be pleased to welcome Jim Wright to the agency beginning in January. As an operator, Jim understands the need for regulatory certainty, and I look forward to working with him to ensure that this industry remains vibrant.

With only one month left before the legislative session begins, I have continued to work with legislators to emphasize the need for a fully funded agency. As we head into the final stretch before opening day, that process will remain a priority for myself and this agency.

Commissioner Sitton

COMMISSIONERS' CORNER

Commissioner Ryan Sitton's first book, *Crucial Decisions*, was released on Nov. 10 and is now available! Commissioner Sitton continues transitioning back to the CEO role at his successful company, Pinnacle, which is located in Pasadena. He has recently spoken (virtually) to some student groups and is working on his Ph.D.

Commissioner Christian

COMMISSIONERS' CORNER

Commissioner Wayne Christian recently participated in the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission (IOGCC) virtual annual meeting. At the meeting, Christian was selected to be Vice Chairman of the Commission, serving under Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt.

"I am honored to enter this new leadership role for our nation's oldest and most respected energy compact commission," said Christian. "I look forward to using my role to advocate on behalf of consumers and oil and gas industry that face unprecedented challenges due to COVID-19 and unjustified political attacks."

To read more, visit <https://rrc.texas.gov/about-us/commissioners/christian/news/111620-christian-iogcc/>.

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View monthly production totals of crude oil, condensate and total oil; and of gas well gas, casinghead gas, and total natural gas.

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Enforcement Actions

The Commission has primary oversight and enforcement of the state's oil and gas industry and intrastate pipeline safety. View RRC's Latest Enforcement Actions here.

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Public GIS Viewer

The Public GIS Viewer allows users to view oil, gas and pipeline data in a map view.

[LAUNCH THE PUBLIC GIS VIEWER ▶](#)