



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

March 6, 2003

Mr. Craig H. Smith
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Workers' Compensation Commission
4000 South IH-35, MS-4D
Austin, Texas 78704

OR2003-1493

Dear Mr. Smith:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 177627.

The Texas Workers' Compensation Commission (the "commission") received a request for information relating to whether files involving fifteen named individuals are open or closed. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This exception encompasses information that another statute makes confidential. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with section 402.092 of the Labor Code. Section 402.092 provides that information maintained in the investigative files of the commission is confidential and may not be disclosed except in four limited circumstances, none of which is applicable in this instance. *See* Labor Code § 402.092(a). "Investigation file" is defined as meaning "any information compiled or maintained by the commission with respect to a commission investigation authorized by law." *Id.* § 402.092(d). Section 414.005 of the Labor Code provides that the commission's Compliance and Practices Division shall maintain an investigation unit for the purpose of conducting investigations relating to alleged violations of the Texas Workers' Compensation Act (the "Act") and the commission's administrative rules. *See* Labor Code § 414.005; *see also id.* §§ 414.001, .002.

You inform us that the information at issue concerns possible violations of the Labor Code, the Act, and the commission's administrative rules. You state that this information is maintained by the Compliance and Practices Division in its investigation files and thus is

confidential under section 402.092. Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we conclude that the information is confidential under section 402.092 of the Labor Code. Therefore, the commission must withhold this information in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government Code as information made confidential by law. As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your other arguments against disclosure.

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 Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. 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,



James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/sdk

Ref: ID# 177627

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Gary L. Jones
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(w/o enclosures)