



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

May 16, 2007

Ms. Mary R. Risner  
Director - Litigation Division  
Office of Legal Services  
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
P.O. Box 13087  
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2007-06067

Dear Ms. Risner:

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# 278764.

The Texas Environmental Commission on Environmental Quality (the "commission") received two requests from the same requestor for several *categories of information* pertaining to Texas Instruments and a specific area of *contaminated land*. You have released some responsive information, but claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information. We have also considered the comments submitted by an attorney for the requestor. *See Gov't Code § 552.304* (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why *information should or should not be released*).

Section 552.107(1) excepts from disclosure information protected by the attorney-client privilege. *See Gov't Code § 552.107(1)*. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to *withhold the information at issue*. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services" to the client governmental body. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is *involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client*

governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a confidential communication, *id.* 503(b)(1), meaning it was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication.” *Id.* 503(a)(5). Section 552.107 may except from disclosure notes in an attorney’s client file if they contain confidences of the client or reveal the opinions, advice, or recommendations that have been made or will be made to the client or associated attorneys. Open Records Decision No. 574 at 6 (1990).

Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the intent of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, no writ). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain that the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You state the submitted information consists of notes written by one of the commission’s staff attorneys memorializing a conversation she had with a commission employee in preparation for a meeting. You further state that the attorney’s role during this conversation was that of a professional legal counsel and that this communication was confidential and has remained so. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we agree that the information is protected by the attorney-client privilege. We therefore conclude the commission may withhold the submitted information pursuant to section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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 Office of the Attorney General 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. 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,



Aries Solis  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

AS/eeg

Ref: ID# 278764

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Margaret Allen  
Senior Reporter - Dallas Business Journal  
12801 North Central Expressway, Suite 800  
Dallas, Texas 75243  
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. David H. Harper  
Haynes and Boone, LLP  
901 Main Street, Suite 3100  
Dallas, Texas 75202  
(w/o enclosures)