



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

June 16, 2009

Ms. Sharon Alexander  
Associate General Counsel  
Texas Department of Transportation  
125 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2009-08314

Dear Ms. Alexander:

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# 346240.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received requests from two requestors for information relating to a specified bid number, including the responses of Eagle Construction and Environmental Services, L.P. ("Eagle") and USA Environmental, L.P. ("USA"). You state that some of the requested information has been released. You take no position on the public availability of the rest of the requested information. You believe, however, that the remaining information may implicate the interests of Eagle and USA. You notified the interested parties of these requests for information and of their right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information should not be released.<sup>1</sup> We received correspondence from an attorney for Eagle. We have considered Eagle's arguments and reviewed the information you submitted.

We note that an interested third party is allowed ten business days from the date of its receipt of a governmental body's notice under section 552.305 of the Government Code to submit

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<sup>1</sup>See Gov't Code § 552.305(d); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.305 permitted governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure under certain circumstances).

its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this decision, this office has received no correspondence from USA. Therefore, because USA has not demonstrated that any of its information is confidential or proprietary for the purposes of the Act, the department may not withhold any of USA's information on either of those grounds. *See id.* §§ 552.101, .110(a)-(b); Open Records Decision Nos. 552 at 5 (1990), 661 at 5-6 (1999).

Eagle contends that its information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.110 of the Government Code.<sup>2</sup> Section 552.110 protects the proprietary interests of private parties with respect to two types of information: (1) "[a] trade secret obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision," and (2) "commercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained." Gov't Code § 552.110(a)-(b).

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, as, for example, the amount or other terms of a secret bid for a contract or the salary of certain employees . . . . 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.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763, 776 (Tex. 1958). If a governmental body takes no position on the application of the "trade secrets" aspect of section 552.110 to the information at issue, this office will accept a private person's claim for exception as valid under section 552.110(a) if the person establishes a *prima facie* case for the exception and no one submits an argument that rebuts

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<sup>2</sup>We note that the submitted documents do not contain some of the information that Eagle seeks to have withheld. This decision is applicable only to the information that the department submitted to this office in requesting this decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(D) (governmental body must submit specific information at issue or representative samples if information is voluminous).

the claim as a matter of law.<sup>3</sup> See ORD 552 at 5. We cannot conclude that section 552.110(a) is applicable unless it has been shown that the information at issue meets the definition of a trade secret and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim. See Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983).

Section 552.110(b) requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that substantial competitive injury would likely result from release of the information at issue. See ORD 661 at 5-6 (business enterprise must show by specific factual evidence that release of information would cause it substantial competitive harm).

Among other things, Eagle contends that disclosure of its information "could have a detrimental effect on the quality of services received by the government" and "will discourage companies such as Eagle from providing any proposal to the government." In submitting these arguments, Eagle appears to rely on the test pertaining to the applicability of the section 552(b)(4) exemption under the federal Freedom of Information Act to third-party information held by a federal agency, as announced in *National Parks & Conservation Association v. Morton*, 498 F.2d 765 (D.C. Cir. 1974). See also *Critical Mass Energy Project v. Nuclear Regulatory Comm'n*, 975 F.2d 871 (D.C. Cir. 1992) (commercial information exempt from disclosure if it is voluntarily submitted to government and is of a kind that provider would not customarily make available to public). Although this office once applied the *National Parks* test under the statutory predecessor to section 552.110, that standard was overturned by the Third Court of Appeals when it held that *National Parks* was not a judicial decision within the meaning of former section 552.110. See *Birnbaum v. Alliance of Am. Insurers*, 994 S.W.2d 766 (Tex. App.—Austin 1999, pet. denied). Section 552.110(b) now expressly states the standard to be applied and requires a specific

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<sup>3</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 other 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).

factual demonstration that the release of the information in question would cause the business enterprise that submitted the information substantial competitive harm. *See* ORD 661 at 5-6 (discussing enactment of Gov't Code § 552.110(b) by Seventy-sixth Legislature). The ability of a governmental body to continue to obtain information from private parties is not a relevant consideration under section 552.110(b). *Id.* Therefore, we will consider only Eagle's interests in withholding its information.

Having considered Eagle's arguments and reviewed its information, we have marked information relating to Eagle's customers that the department must withhold under section 552.110(a). Although Eagle's documents contain other customer information, those customers are also identified on the company's Internet website. We are unable to conclude that information published on Eagle's website constitutes a trade secret of the company or that the release of such information will cause Eagle substantial competitive harm. We find that Eagle has not demonstrated that any of the remaining information at issue constitutes a trade secret under section 552.110(a). We also find that Eagle has not made the specific factual or evidentiary showing required by section 552.110(b) that release of any of the remaining information would cause Eagle substantial competitive harm. We therefore conclude that the department may not withhold any of the remaining information relating to Eagle under section 552.110. *See* Gov't Code § 552.110(a)-(b); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 509 at 5 (1988) (because costs, bid specifications, and circumstances would change for future contracts, assertion that release of bid proposal might give competitor unfair advantage on future contracts was entirely too speculative), 319 at 3 (1982) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.110 generally not applicable to information relating to organization and personnel, market studies, professional references, qualifications and experience, and pricing).

With specific regard to Eagle's pricing information, we note that Eagle's proposal resulted in a contract with the department. Pricing information pertaining to a particular contract is generally not a trade secret because it is "simply information as to single or ephemeral events in the conduct of the business," rather than "a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business." *See* RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d at 776; Open Records Decision Nos. 319 at 3 (1982), 306 at 3 (1982). Likewise, the pricing aspects of a contract with a governmental entity are generally not excepted from disclosure under section 552.110(b). *See* Open Records Decision No. 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors); *see generally* Freedom of Information Act Guide & Privacy Act Overview at 219 (2000) (federal cases applying analogous Freedom of Information Act exemption reason that disclosure of prices charged government is a cost of doing business with government). Moreover, the terms of a contract with a governmental body are generally not excepted from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(3) (contract involving receipt or expenditure of public funds expressly made public); Open Records Decision No. 541 at 8 (1990) (public has interest in knowing terms of contract with state agency). Therefore, Eagle's pricing information may not be withheld under section 552.110.

We note that Eagle's proposal contains license plate numbers, vehicle identification numbers, and other motor vehicle registration information. Section 552.130 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information relating to a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state.<sup>4</sup> See Gov't Code § 552.130(a)(2). The types of motor vehicle information that we have marked must be withheld under section 552.130 wherever they appear in Eagle's proposal to the extent that the information consists of a Texas license plate number, vehicle identification number, or motor vehicle registration information. We note that this exception is not applicable to out-of-state motor vehicle information.

Eagle's proposal also contains credit card and insurance policy numbers. Section 552.136 of the Government Code provides that "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of [the Act], a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential."<sup>5</sup> *Id.* § 552.136(b); see *id.* § 552.136(a) (defining "access device"). We have marked the credit card and insurance policy numbers that must be withheld under section 552.136.

In summary: (1) the department must withhold the information that we have marked under section 552.110 of the Government Code; (2) the types of motor vehicle information that we have marked must be withheld under section 552.130 of the Government Code wherever they appear in Eagle's proposal to the extent that the information consists of a Texas license plate number, vehicle identification number, or motor vehicle registration information; and (3) the marked credit card and insurance policy numbers must be withheld under section 552.136 of the Government Code. The rest of the submitted 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,

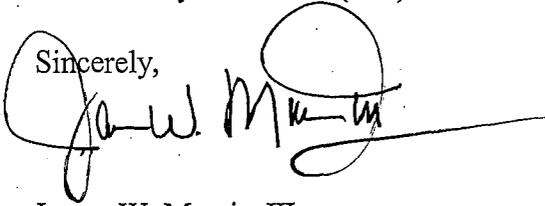
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<sup>4</sup>Unlike other exceptions to disclosure under the Act, this office will raise section 552.130 on behalf of a governmental body, as this exception is mandatory and may not be waived. See Gov't Code §§ 552.007, .352; Open Records Decision No. 674 at 3 n.4 (2001) (mandatory exceptions).

<sup>5</sup>Section 552.136 also is a mandatory exception that may not be waived. Gov't Code §§ 552.007, .352; ORD 674 at 3 n.4.

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 at (512) 475-2497.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. Morris, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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

JWM/cc

Ref: ID# 346240

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Requestors  
(w/o enclosures)

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