



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 16, 2019

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

OR2019-01458

Dear Ms. Backens:

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# 746800 (PIR No. 19-43646).

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (the "commission") received a request for information pertaining to a specified water investigation. You state you have released some information. You state the commission will withhold certain e-mail addresses pursuant to Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009).<sup>1</sup> You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. You also state you notified Formosa Point Comfort Plant ("Formosa") of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances). We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

An interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why

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<sup>1</sup>Open Records Decision No. 684 is a previous determination to all governmental bodies authorizing them to withhold certain information, including an e-mail address of a member of the public under section 552.137 of the Government Code, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, we have not received comments from Formosa explaining why the submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude Formosa has a protected proprietary interest in the submitted information. *See id.* § 552.110; Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must show by specific factual evidence, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that release of requested information would cause party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3. Accordingly, the commission may not withhold the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest Formosa may have in the information.

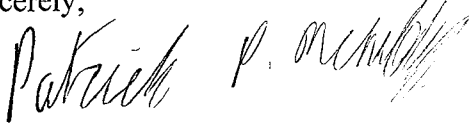
Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses section 382.041 of the Health and Safety Code, which provides, in part, “a member, employee, or agent of the commission may not disclose information submitted to the commission relating to secret processes or methods of manufacture or production that is identified as confidential when submitted.” Health & Safety Code § 382.041(a). This office has concluded section 382.041 protects information that is submitted to the commission if a *prima facie* case is established the information constitutes a trade secret under the definition set forth in the Restatement of Torts and if the submitting party identified the information as being confidential when submitting it to the commission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 652 (1997). The commission states Formosa marked portions of the submitted information as confidential when Formosa provided the submitted information to the commission. Thus, the submitted information is confidential under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with 382.041 to the extent it constitutes a trade secret. However, as noted above, Formosa has not submitted arguments to this office explaining how any of the submitted information constitutes a trade secret. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). Therefore, we have no basis to conclude any of this information constitutes a trade secret. *See id.* § 552.110; ORDs 552 at 5, 542 at 3. Consequently, the commission may not withhold any of the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 382.041 of the Health and Safety Code. As no further exceptions to disclosure have been raised, the commission must release the submitted 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 providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Patrick Mehaffy  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

PM/eb

Ref: ID# 746800

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

cc: 1 Third Party  
(w/o enclosures)