



**Public Input of Virginia Palacios  
Executive Director of Commission Shift  
Railroad Commission of Texas Open Meeting  
April 14, 2026**

The Railroad Commission has demonstrated a dangerous pattern of distancing itself from community members impacted by noncompliant companies. These communities have had to live with air pollution, toxic runoff onto their properties, and groundwater contamination.

The commission's failure to swiftly penalize these operators or stop their operations is the definition of injustice. Neighbors of these facilities have spent years compiling data, filing complaints, and uncovering evidence of violations only for little to no enforcement action to be taken or for permits to be renewed anyway.

The Office of Attorney General recently proposed a settlement with Blackhorn Environmental Services in Jim Wells County over their air pollution, accepting unauthorized waste, and preventing access to records.<sup>1</sup> The proposed settlement includes \$300,000 in civil penalties, \$100,000 in attorneys fees, and adoption of air monitoring procedures. Yet, neither the commission nor the Office of Attorney General notified impacted community members of the public comment period for the proposed settlement.

Some of the violations at Blackhorn began as early as 2019. There were four impacted community members registered to speak at the April 2021 Railroad Commission Open Meeting, but you did not call on any of them before making a decision to renew the permit.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Addition. Texas Register February 13, 2026 Issue.

<sup>2</sup> These community members had new information to share that was not part of the public hearing. See: Railroad Commission of Texas. April 13, 2021 Open Meeting. Admin Monitor. Timestamp: 7:08. Retrieved from: [http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/rrc/open\\_meeting/20210413/](http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/rrc/open_meeting/20210413/)

Railroad Commission staff worked with the Office of Attorney General to file the case just a year later in 2022, and I thank you and your staff for doing so.<sup>3</sup> The three of you could have saved your constituents from the health impacts and nuisance of living next to a noncompliant facility, but instead these neighbors have had to wait over five years for this case to work its way through a district court, and that is an injustice.

A few months ago, another community in East Texas asked the Office of Public Engagement to schedule an in-person public meeting to discuss another waste disposal facility with repeated violations. The request was clear that the community did not want to rehash the permit decision, but they wanted to hear from Railroad Commission staff and have their questions answered.<sup>4</sup> The response from the commission was to deny the request for a public meeting on the grounds the permit had already been approved, and to shut off all communication to commission staff except through the Railroad Commission's attorneys.<sup>5</sup>

Public agencies exist to serve the public. That means that you and your staff must make time to hear from and educate the public. Meaningful public engagement is a two-way street. It takes place both in person and online. It should be welcoming and non-threatening. And it may get us one step closer to justice.

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<sup>3</sup> State of Texas v. Blackhorn Environmental Services, LLC; Cause No. D-1-GN-22-001858; in the 459th Judicial District Court, Travis County, Texas.

<sup>4</sup> Email correspondence. Dec. 8, 2025. Subject: Elysian Fields Meeting Request Follow-up. From: Paula A. To: Scott Sroufe.

<sup>5</sup> Larson, Scott. Dec. 22, 2025. Letter from Railroad Commission Office of General Counsel to Paula Atkinson. Re: Permit No. STF-0173.