



Physicians Caring for Texans

Dec. 15, 2010

Mr. Ken Levine
Director, Sunset Advisory Commission
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Mr. Levine:

The Texas Medical Association (TMA) recognizes the critical mission of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. The decisions that guide the regulation of the Texas environment also directly affect the health of Texans. TMA encourages you to ensure the commission considers the impact of environmental hazards on the public's health and, in particular, the health of the state's most vulnerable Texans.

The Sunset staff report notes that addressing citizen concerns is an essential part of establishing meaningful public policy. There is no greater way to protect and represent the public's interest than to ensure that the state's environmental agency also considers health outcomes in its policies.

In September 2010, TMA's Council on Science and Public Health endorsed a recommendation calling for a strong public health voice in the work of the commission. We encourage you to build on the work already supported by the commission and the Texas Environmental Health Institute by requiring the commission to strengthen the role of public health in environmental policy and decision making. Other states already consider public health factors in developing state environmental health policies and making permitting decisions. The state of Utah includes a public health assessment that describes the health impact of new environmental standards. The state of Maryland requires a description of the potential impact of a decision on unique environmental health constituencies such as young children or pregnant women.

Texas can ensure a public health perspective without incurring additional costs by stipulating that at least one of the Texas environmental quality commissioners has expertise in public health or in medicine (preferably both). This includes expertise in health epidemiology and the ability to assess the potential health burden associated with environmental pollution and other environmental hazards. This would help support a balanced review that would consider the underlying health, demographics, and social environment of a community that is affected by environmental regulation.

We thank you for your work and would be willing to collaborate further with you to enhance the role of public health in regulating our environment.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Levin, MD, MSPH
Chair, Council on Science and Public Health