

Dear GEAA members and friends,

When people kill random innocents it is called "terrorism". When corporations do it, it is called "an industrial accident". The juxtaposition of deadly events this week - the bombing at the Boston marathon and the explosion at West Fertilizer Company - beg a serious rethinking of the role of government in protecting public health and welfare.

Both events were similar in the numbers of dead and injured. The Boston bombing has provoked action nationwide aimed at protecting the public. Today I received a notice that backpacks and large purses would not be permitted entry into "Night in Old San Antonio", San Antonio's four day Street party. Planners of large events, police, and our governmental agencies have reacted swiftly to prevent another such outrage.

Sadly, a dysfunctional permitting process managed by the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality (TCEQ) provides little protection for the citizens of Texas, as demonstrated by the explosion of the West Fertilizer Company that wiped out five city blocks in West, Texas. In our experience, it is nearly impossible to persuade TCEQ to deny permits. Though contested case hearings have resulted in recommendations to deny certain permits on the grounds that they will adversely affect communities and property owners, the TCEQ Commissioners (all appointed by Governor Perry) habitually ignores this advice and votes to approve the permits anyway.

Meanwhile, the 83rd Texas Legislature is considering the passage of bills that would reduce requirements for public notice; prohibit Texans access to Contested Case Hearings for air quality, water quality, and waste permits; and (can you believe it?) do away with tracking the compliance histories of permitted businesses. Too many bills being considered this session would further compromise efforts to protect the public through competent and adequate regulation; other bills would prohibit cities from enforcing water quality and tree preservation ordinances, raise the threshold for reporting sewage spills, and weaken requirements for the disposal of sludge.

I hope our Legislators aren't so tone deaf as to pass a resolution expressing sympathy for the victims of the West Fertilizer Company explosion - for they are responsible for the conditions that allowed this to happen.

Annalisa Peace
Executive Director

More information on bad bills filed during this 83rd Legislative session can be found on GEAA's web site at www.AquiferAlliance.org