



## Texas Radiation Advisory Board

Michael Ford, C.H.P.  
Chair

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January 30, 2004

The Honorable Rick Perry  
Governor of Texas  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Governor Perry:

I understand that your office has reviewed information sent to you by the Texas Department of Health (TDH) about the crisis situation they have with turnover and retention of health physicists in the Bureau of Radiation Control (BRC). I am writing to send the Texas Radiation Advisory Board's (TRAB) strongest support for the prompt implementation of "Short Term Solutions" presented in the department's paper dated November 14, 2003.

I understand your office has communicated your support and approval of the short-term solutions to TDH management. The TRAB appreciates your attention and support on this very critical matter.

We hope that the TDH will act with utmost haste to implement these recommendations. As of the writing this letter, it is my understanding that no definitive actions have been taken to implement the short-term solutions that are urgently needed; although some discussions have taken place.

We are strongly encouraging prompt action because Texas faces a critical shortage of trained health physicists and the state should do whatever it can to alleviate the recruitment and retention problems currently being experienced. There are currently areas of the state where no resident Bureau of Radiation Control inspectors exist; a prime example is the El Paso area (position vacant since October 10, 2000). Additionally, there have been chronic personnel shortages in the Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston areas. Certainly, in this environment where concern for the safety and security of radioactive materials is at an all-time high, such situations cannot be allowed to exist.

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At our November 15, 2003, meeting, this issue was discussed at length with senior department management. The TDH's issue papers explain the importance of health physicists to the successful, routine operation of the radiation control program, including those operations that are critical to the security of radioactive materials. Therefore, I will not elaborate except to say that the TRAB recognizes that the positions within the BRC require highly competent and educated individuals with specialized training in biology, chemistry, environmental science, and nuclear physics to name a few disciplines.

Individuals meeting these qualifications are few and far between.

We understand and are very sensitive to the fiscal difficulties the state has faced. Your administration has done an excellent job in getting control of the state's finances and bringing clarity to the fiscal picture. The TRAB recognizes that salary increases will ultimately result in increases in regulatory fees; however, the increase will be revenue neutral to the state because the program collects 100% of its costs through fees.

It is incumbent upon the state and TDH to attempt to attract health physicists with more competitive salaries and work to retain them once they have become proficient in their positions. This entire issue boils down to the long-standing problem of the state not recognizing the true value of these particular human resources and a lack of appropriations to allow for job classifications or fee structures that accurately reflect the BRC's *true cost* of doing business; hence, our historical problem of the retention of health physicists has now reached a critical point.

The TRAB has made recommendations about the issue of state health physicist salaries on numerous occasions. I am sending you copies of these statements for the record.

You are blessed with a BRC staff that is among the best in the country. They are high quality people who have committed many years to public service, and we hope to keep them. While the ongoing reorganization is clouding the future of the radiation protection program, it is imperative that TDH act quickly to implement the solutions you have approved to stem the loss of health physicists.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at your earliest convenience. We appreciate your support on this issue of utmost importance.

Very truly yours,  
Original signed by:

Michael S. Ford, C.H.P.  
Chair

cc: Albert Hawkins, Commissioner Health and Human Services  
cc: Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., Commissioner  
cc: Representative Warren Chisum

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Enclosures:

The Texas Radiation Advisory Board (TRAB) has made recommendations on improving health physics salaries since the early 1990s. Most recent recommendations can be found on <http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/radiation/TRABpdf.htm>:

- January 17, 2002, letters to Board of Health, Appropriations Committee, Senate Finance Committee and House Environmental Regulation Committee, “ The TRAB feels that your attention needs to be drawn to this very critical matter with utmost haste and resolve.”
- April 29, 2002, testimony, Environmental Regulation Committee
- July 18, 2002, testimony, Texas Board of Health Hearing
- July 22, 2002, letter to the Governor, Legislative Budget Board, Commissioner of Health, Board of Health, House Appropriations Committee, House Committee on Environmental Regulation, Senate Finance Committee, Homeland Security Task Force
- September 6, 2002, testimony, Joint Budget Hearing Texas Department of Health
- February 12 and 28, 2003, letters to the Subcommittee on Appropriations for Health and Human Services and the Senate Finance Committee

Texas Department of Health, Bureau of Radiation Control reference documents:

- “Radiation Control Program Faces Loss of Radiation Experts and Shortage of Qualified Candidates, December 2001”
- “Health Physics Staffing Crisis Status October 2003”
- “Staff Retention, Training and Education,” November 4, 2003
- “Radiation Control Technical Staffing,” November 14, 2003