

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

EHCMA Statement Regarding Concerns about Regulatory Compliance during COVID-19

The safety, health and wellbeing of the community and our employees remain top priorities for East Harris County Manufacturers Association (EHCMA) as our member facilities maintain essential production to meet increasing demand for vital chemical products, such as sanitizers, disinfectants, face masks and other personal protective equipment, as well as plastics for the health care community, consumers and governments.

During this COVID-19 pandemic crisis, our member companies have taken precautionary measures to ensure the health of employees while preserving safe and environmentally sound operations. This includes limiting the number of people allowed to access facilities and following CDC recommendations for a healthy work environment during the “Stay Home – Work Safe” timeframe. Facilities in East Harris County continue to operate safely with only essential personnel that include individuals required to perform critical tasks related to safety and environmental compliance.

There is no suspension of environmental standards on a state or federal level. However, due to COVID-19 and stay home orders, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) granted temporary enforcement discretion to provide manufacturers additional time to complete administrative requirements, such as regulatory filings, and allow inspections to be rescheduled if workforce shortages, travel and movement restrictions challenge administrative compliance. Any company in need of this flexibility is required to notify agencies.

TCEQ specifically indicated that their own staff shortage is one reason they have granted discretion for reporting deadlines during the COVID-19 crisis. TCEQ’s chairman issued a [letter](#) stating that the agency “has not relaxed any limits on air emissions or discharges to water [nor issued]... a suspension of rules.”

EPA issued a [statement](#) regarding inaccurate reports on its temporary enforcement policy regarding routine monitoring and reporting requirements. The agency stated, “EPA’s enforcement authority and responsibility remains active. EPA strongly encourages entities to make every effort to comply with their environmental compliance obligations...and...expects full compliance going forward.”

Click on the links to read factual details regarding the announced [EPA](#) & [TCEQ](#) policies.

EHCMA members are committed to continue safe and compliant operation of facilities and agree that enforcement discretion should only be sought when absolutely necessary. Additionally, we understand our responsibility in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. We must maintain safe operations and protect public health while producing critical products that meet America’s supply needs. These products include life-saving medicines; medical equipment and medical-grade personal protective equipment, such as masks, gowns and goggles; disinfectants, including chlorine for clean drinking water; a safe food supply; and, fuel and other materials for transportation of necessary supplies.