

CITY OF LAREDO

June 12, 1992

Mr. Jesus Garza
Executive Director
Texas Water Commission
P.O. Box 13087
1700 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78711-3087

Dear Mr. Garza:

I would like you to communicate a serious environmental concern confronting the City of Laredo regarding aviation fuel contamination at the Laredo International Airport.

The City of Laredo is in a predicament regarding the fuel farm at the Laredo International Airport (formerly Laredo Air Force Base) that it acquired from the Federal Government in 1975.

An active fuel farm since 1940, aviation fuel and oil storage capacity at one time exceeded 2.5 million gallons.

The City in 1990 discovered both aviation gasoline and jet fuel contamination of the ground water and soils within the tank cavity area of the six USTs in use by the City's Fixed Base Operators. Reference LSPT ID No. 95021.

Immediately, the City installed two recovery wells at the tank cavity to extract the free product and has continued to extract the free product at diminishing amounts.

In addition to the recovery wells, the City installed four monitor wells. There is no free product at these monitor wells, however, the lab analysis of down gradient monitor wells exhibit elements found in aviation gasoline.

In 1990, the City contracted the testing of the six beneficial-use USTs and pipes and these were shown not to be leaking.

Being that the City's six beneficial-use USTs and pipes tested tight, the City researched Air Force records and found that it was standard operating procedure from 1942 to 1969 for the Air Force to dispose contaminated fuels on gravel pits at the site. These gravel pits are located up gradient from the City's six beneficial use USTs.

Only three of the six beneficial use USTs are presently in use by the Airport's Fixed Base Operator. The City's goal is for the User to vacate the three USTs as soon as possible.

On June 6, 1992 the City excavated in the proximity of the six beneficial USTs to determine the depth of the piping system as requested by the Texas Water Commission. The excavation revealed old contaminated soil close to the surface. The shallow contamination confirms the City's suspicion of surface disposal of contaminated fuels by the Air Force at the site of the six beneficial-use USTs.

Other information that suggests that the City's six beneficial-use USTs are not leaking is as follows:

1. The fuel taken from the six beneficial-use USTs has passed rigorous quality assurance requirements of the military and the airlines.
2. The six beneficial-use USTs do not produce excessive or abnormal amounts of water in the fuel which would suggest that the USTs leak out or in.
3. The six USTs are equipped with an overflow prevention device. The fill pumps are automatically shut off when the tanks reach a certain capacity.
4. The six USTs are equipped with an electrically induced cathodic protection system. This system inhibits rust from developing, thus preventing pits from developing in the tank walls.
5. The City in 1975 inspected the six USTs and found the USTs in good condition.
6. The Airport's Fixed Base Operators have not reported any fuel losses.
7. The six beneficial-use USTs are connected to an interceptor tank which acts to capture and contain fuel spills. Excavation work on June 6, 1992 showed the immediate area of the interceptor tank to be clean.

Information which suggests that the fuel farm was contaminated by the Air Force is as follows:

1. Shallow contaminated soils were found during June 6, 1992 excavation of the piping system. The contaminated soils are located adjacent to the six beneficial-use USTs suggests surface drainage of the contaminated fuels by the Air Force. The contamination found is old contamination. No free product or water was encountered.
2. There are abandoned gravel pits located up gradient from the six beneficial-use USTs. These gravel pits were used to dispose of contaminated fuels.
3. The Air Force did not appear to have an industrial waste treatment facility until 1969.
4. The interceptor tank whose purpose is to capture and contain contaminated fuel and fuel spills was not installed until 1969.
5. A bore hole made by the Corps of Engineers in 1951 showed oil seepage at a depth of 3.5 ft.
6. There are approximately 14 abandoned USTs located up-gradient from the City's six beneficial-use USTs. A recent excavation to install recovery wells at an up-gradient location from the six beneficial-use USTs revealed old and new hydrocarbon contamination. (Barker Aeromotive)
7. Use of liquid asphalt and soil sterilents by the Air Force to treat the ground surface.

This information strongly suggests that the existing contamination was caused by the Air Force and not by the City's use of the six USTs.

Despite the fact that all information available to the City suggests that the Air Force is the responsible party of the existing contamination, the Texas Water Commission is demanding that the City of Laredo take immediate action to mitigate the contamination and has threatened to fine the City up to \$10,000 per day.

The City is doing additional work to satisfy a directive from the Texas Water Commission to preclude any fines from being imposed.

After a lengthy period of deliberation, the Army Corps of Engineers has agreed to remove 20 underground fuel storage tanks that were abandoned by the Air Force.

The City has relied on written representations from the Corps of Engineers of their willingness to do the Laredo Project as soon as possible to justify the City's request to the Texas Water Commission to defer costly remediation action on the part of the City until the Corps completes their project.

We are confident that the Corps' Laredo Project will confirm that the source of contamination at the City's beneficial use USTs was the Air Force practice of disposing contaminated water condensate at the site and the abandoned underground storage tanks. The confirmation that the federal government is the responsible party will hopefully convince the Corps to assume remediation of the entire site including the area of the six beneficial use USTs. Irregardless, the City is proceeding with a mitigation plan as agreed with the Texas Water Commission.

The Corps has informed the City that the Laredo Project is the Number 1 project of the Fort Worth, Texas District pending the availability of funding during the remainder of FY 1991/92 or during October 1992 under the new FY 1992/93 appropriation. Reference Corps of Engineers Project, Defense Environmental Restoration Program (DERP), Former Use Defense Sites (FUDS), Site No. K06TX021301.

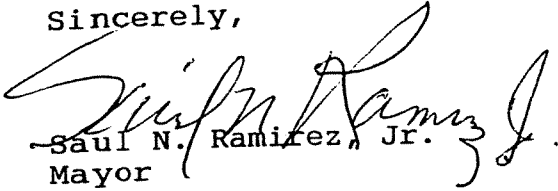
Even though there is aviation gasoline contamination and remediation of aviation gasoline contamination is eligible under the Remediation Program, the Texas Water Commission has advised the City that the Laredo project is not eligible because the contamination consists of both jet and gasoline fuels. The City hereby requests further clarification of the eligibility criteria.

The Texas Water Commission did advise the City that the Laredo Project may be eligible under the LUST Trust Fund if the Airport can prove financial hardship. It was explained to the City that the Texas Water Commission would seek recovery of LUST Trust Fund participation from the Airport (site owner).

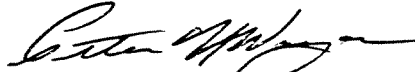
In the event the Laredo Airport Project is found not eligible for funding under the Texas Water Commission Remediation Program, the City will promptly prepare an application on behalf of the Airport for the LUST Trust Fund.

The City of Laredo kindly requests your assistance in setting forth an effective mitigation plan to address these pressing environmental concerns.

Sincerely,


Saul N. Ramirez, Jr.
Mayor

Sincerely,


Peter H. Vargas
City Manager

PHV/as

xc: Carlos Villarreal
Joe Aranda
Diana Arredondo
Amador Escudero
Jerry Cain