

UNITED STATES
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 6

FILED
2015 MAR 10 AM 11:05
RECORDING CLERK
EPA REGION VI

In the Matter of § Docket No. CWA-06-2015-1722
§
Gulf Coast Waste Disposal Authority, §
§ Proceeding to Assess a Class II
§ Civil Penalty under Section 309(g)
§ of the Clean Water Act
Respondent §
§ ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLAINT
NPDES Permit No. TX0052591 §

I. Statutory Authority

This Complaint is issued under the authority vested in the Administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) by Section 309(g) of the Clean Water Act (“the Act”), 33 U.S.C. § 1319(g). The Administrator of EPA has delegated the authority to issue this Complaint to the Regional Administrator of EPA Region 6, who delegated this authority to the Director of the Compliance Assurance and Enforcement Division of EPA Region 6 (“Complainant”). This Class II Administrative Complaint is issued in accordance with, and this action will be conducted under, “the Consolidated Rules of Practice Governing the Administrative Assessment of Civil Penalties and the Revocation/Termination or Suspension of Permits,” including rules related to administrative proceedings not governed by Section 554 of the Administrative Procedures Act, 40 C.F.R. § 22.50 through 22.52.

Based on the following Findings, Complainant finds that Respondent has violated the Act and the regulations promulgated under the Act and should be ordered to pay a civil penalty.

II. Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law

1. Gulf Coast Waste Disposal Authority (“Respondent”) is a public body chartered under the laws of the State of Texas with jurisdiction over treatment and disposal of sewage, industrial wastes, or other wastes, and as such is a “municipality” and as such, Respondent is a “person,” as that term is defined at Section 502(5) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1362(5), and 40 C.F.R. § 122.2.

2. At all times relevant to the violations alleged herein (“relevant time period”), Respondent owned or operated a publicly-owned treatment works called the Washburn Tunnel Facility located on the south bank of Houston Ship Channel, approximately one-half mile west and upstream of the Washburn Tunnel, in Houston, Harris County, Texas (“facility”) and was, therefore, an “owner or operator” within the meaning of 40 C.F.R. § 122.2.

3. During the relevant time period, the facility acted as a “point source” of a “discharge” of “pollutants” with its wastewater to the receiving waters of the Houston Ship Channel/Buffalo Bayou Tidal in Segment No. 1007 of the San Jacinto River Basin, which is considered a “water of the United States” within the meaning of Section 502 of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1362, and 40 C.F.R. § 122.2.

4. Because Respondent owned or operated a facility that acted as a point source of discharges of pollutants to waters of the United States, Respondent and the facility were subject to the Act and the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (“NPDES”) permit program.

5. Under Section 301 of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1311, it is unlawful for any person to discharge any pollutant from a point source to waters of the United States, except with the authorization of, and in compliance with, an NPDES permit issued pursuant to Section 402 of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1342.

6. Section 402(a) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1342(a), provides that the Administrator of EPA may issue permits under the NPDES program for the discharge of pollutants from point

sources to waters of the United States. Any such discharge is subject to the specific terms and conditions prescribed in the applicable permit.

7. Respondent applied for and was issued NPDES Permit No. TX005259 (“permit”) under Section 402 of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1342, which was effective from September 1, 2005 through April 1, 2014. Respondent applied for and was issued NPDES Permit No. TX0052591 (“permit”) under Section 402 of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1342, which became effective on April 2, 2014. During the relevant time periods, Respondent was authorized to discharge pollutants from the facility to waters of the United States but only in compliance with the specific terms and conditions of the permit.

8. “Effluent Limitations and Monitoring Requirements” of the permit places certain limitations on the quality and quantity of effluent discharged by the Respondent. The relevant discharge limitations are specified in Attachment A, which is incorporated herein by reference.

9. “Monitoring and Reporting Requirements” of the permit require Respondent to sample and test its effluent and monitor its compliance with permit conditions according to specific procedures in order to determine the facility’s compliance or noncompliance with the permit and regulations. They also require Respondent to file with EPA and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (“TCEQ”) certified Discharge Monitoring Reports (“DMRs”) of the results of monitoring, and noncompliance reports when appropriate.

10. Certified DMRs filed by the Respondent with EPA and TCEQ in compliance with the permit show discharges of pollutants from the facility that exceed the permitted effluent

limitations. The discharges of pollutants that exceed the permit limitations are specified in Attachment B (see attachment).

11. Each violation of the conditions of the permit or regulations described above is a Violation of Section 301 of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1311.

12. Under Section 309(g)(2)(B) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1319(g)(2)(B), Respondent is liable for a civil penalty in an amount not to exceed \$16,000 per day for each day during which a violation continues, up to a maximum of \$187,500.

13. EPA has notified TCEQ of the issuance of this Complaint and has afforded the State an opportunity to consult with EPA regarding the assessment of an administrative penalty against Respondent as required by Section 309(g)(1) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1319(g)(1).

14. EPA has notified the public of the filing of this Complaint and has afforded the public thirty (30) days in which to comment on the Complaint and on the proposed penalty as required by Section 309(g)(4)(A) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1319(g)(4)(A). At the expiration of the notice period, EPA will consider any comments filed by the public.

III. Proposed Penalty

15. Based on the foregoing Findings, and pursuant to the authority of Sections 309(g)(1) and (g)(2)(B) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1319(g)(1) and Section (g)(2)(B), EPA Region 6 hereby proposes to assess against Respondent a penalty of one hundred ten thousand dollars (\$110,000.00).

16. The proposed penalty amount was determined based on the statutory factors specified in Section 309(g)(3), 33 U.S.C. § 1319(g)(3), which includes such factors as the nature, circumstances, extent and gravity of the violation(s), economic benefits, if any, prior history of such violations, if any, degree of culpability, and such matters as justice may require.

IV. Failure to File an Answer

17. If Respondent wishes to deny or explain any material allegation listed in the above Findings or to contest the amount of the penalty proposed, Respondent must file an Answer to this Complaint within thirty (30) days after service of this Complaint whether or not Respondent requests a hearing as discussed below.

18. The requirements for such an Answer are set forth at 40 C.F.R. § 22.15. Failure to file an Answer to this Complaint within thirty (30) days after service of the Complaint shall constitute an admission of all facts alleged in the Complaint and a waiver of the right to hearing. Failure to deny or contest any individual material allegation contained in the Complaint will constitute an admission as to that finding or conclusion under 40 C.F.R. § 22.15(d).

19. If Respondent does not file an Answer to this Complaint within thirty (30) days after service of this Complaint, a Default Order may be issued against Respondent pursuant to 40 C.F.R. § 22.17. A Default Order, if issued, would constitute a finding of liability, and could make the full amount of the penalty proposed in this Complaint due and payable by Respondent without further proceedings sixty (60) days after a final Default Order is issued.

20. Respondent must send its Answer to this Complaint, including any request for hearing, and all other pleadings to:

Regional Hearing Clerk (6RC-D)
U.S. EPA, Region 6
1445 Ross Avenue, Suite 1200
Dallas, TX 75202-2733

Respondent shall also send a copy of its Answer to this Complaint to the following EPA attorney assigned to this case:

Ms. Ellen Chang-Vaughan (6RC-EW)
U.S. EPA, Region 6
1445 Ross Avenue, Suite 1200
Dallas, TX 75202-2733

21. The Answer must be signed by Respondent, Respondent's counsel, or other representative on behalf of Respondent and must contain all information required by 40 C.F.R. §§ 22.05 and 22.15, including the name, address, and telephone number of Respondent and Respondent's counsel. All other pleadings must be similarly signed and filed.

V. Notice of Opportunity to Request a Hearing

22. Respondent may request a hearing to contest any material allegation contained in this Complaint, or to contest the appropriateness of the amount of the proposed penalty, pursuant to Section 309(g) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1319(g). The procedures for hearings are set out at 40 C.F.R. Part 22, with supplemental rules at 40 C.F.R. § 22.38.

23. Any request for hearing should be included in Respondent's Answer to this Complaint; however, as discussed above, Respondent must file an Answer meeting the requirements of 40 C.F.R. § 22.15 in order to preserve the right to a hearing or to pursue other relief.

24. Should a hearing be requested, members of the public who commented on the issuance of the Complaint during the public comment period will have a right to be heard and to present evidence at such hearing under Section 309(g)(4)(B) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1319(g)(4)(B).

VI. Settlement

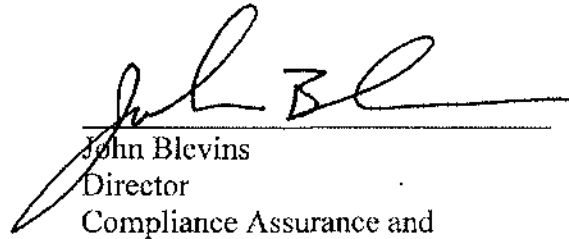
25. EPA encourages all parties against whom civil penalties are proposed to pursue the possibility of settlement through informal meetings with EPA. Regardless of whether a formal hearing is requested, Respondent may confer informally with EPA about the alleged violations or the amount of the proposed penalty. Respondent may wish to appear at any informal conference or formal hearing personally, by counsel or other representative, or both. To request an informal conference on the matters described in this Complaint, please contact Mr. Ted Palit, P.E., of my staff, at (214) 665-8061.

26. If this action is settled without a formal hearing and issuance of an opinion by the Presiding Officer pursuant to 40 C.F.R. § 22.27, this action will be concluded by issuance of a Consent Agreement and Final Order ("CAFO") pursuant to 40 C.F.R. § 22.18(b). The issuance of a CAFO would waive Respondent's right to a hearing on any matter stipulated to therein or

alleged in the Complaint. Any person who commented on this Complaint would be notified and given an additional thirty (30) days to petition EPA to set aside any such CAFO and to hold a hearing on the issues raised in the Complaint. Such a petition would be granted and a hearing held only if the evidence presented by the petitioner's comment was material and was not considered by EPA in the issuance of the CAFO.

27. Neither assessment nor payment of a penalty in resolution of this action will affect Respondent's continuing obligation to comply with all requirements of the Act, the applicable regulations and permits, and any separate Compliance Order issued under Section 309(a) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1319(a), including one relating to the violations alleged herein.

3.4.15
Date


John Blevins
Director
Compliance Assurance and
Enforcement Division

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that the foregoing Class II Administrative Complaint was sent to the following persons, in the manner specified, on the date below:

Original hand-delivered: Regional Hearing Clerk (6RC-D)
U.S. EPA, Region 6
1445 Ross Avenue, Suite 1200
Dallas, TX 75202-2733

Copy by certified mail,
return receipt requested: Mr. Ricky Clifton
General Manager
Gulf Coast Waste Disposal Authority
910 Bay Area Boulevard
Houston, TX 77058

Copy by Mail: Mr. Sandy Van Cleave (MC169)
Manager, Enforcement Section
TCEQ
P.O. Box 13087
Austin, TX 78711-3087

Ms. Sara Marquis Burgin
Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP
One Congress Plaza
111 Congress Ave.
Suite 1000
Austin, TX 78701-4073

Copy hand-delivered: Ms. Ellen Chang-Vaughan (6RC-EW)
U.S. EPA, Region 6
1445 Ross Avenue, Suite 1200
Dallas, TX 75202-2733

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