



# Understanding the RRC



Regulatory agencies, including the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC), operate within specific legal mandates, but roles are often misunderstood by the public, stakeholders and other regulated entities. Confusion often arises about the scope and limits of the RRC's authority. Below, we clarify some common misunderstandings regarding what the agency does and does not regulate under current law.

## Railroad Commission Jurisdiction

The RRC is the state's oldest regulatory agency. It has jurisdiction over our vast energy infrastructure, including oil and gas production, natural gas, hydrogen and hazardous liquid pipelines, natural gas utilities, coal and uranium surface mining as well as newly emerging industries such as underground hydrogen storage and carbon dioxide storage by deep underground injection.

## Wells, Equipment and Zonings

The RRC regulates well drilling and operations to protect groundwater and the surrounding subsurface environment. This includes reviewing drilling permit applications to ensure compliance with rules on below-ground spacing and acreage. However, the RRC does not have jurisdiction over the zoning of wells. Local governments, such as cities or counties, may have zoning ordinances for wells in their jurisdictions. Note that surface equipment may not represent where oil and gas wells are located due to modern drilling practices.

## Pipelines

The RRC's regulatory role encompasses permitting, safety inspections, damage prevention and enforcement of both state and federal regulations to ensure the safe and reliable operation of intrastate pipelines in Texas. The RRC's Pipeline Damage Prevention Program enforces damage prevention regulations involving excavation around pipelines. Penalties for violations begin at \$1,000 per violation. Members of the public can report damage to gas or liquid pipelines by submitting a form online. You can view the form by scanning the QR code below.



<https://www.rrc.texas.gov/accidents-and-incident-reporting/pipeline-accidents/>

Typically, the RRC has no authority over the routing or siting of intrastate or interstate pipelines. Those decisions are determined by the pipeline's owner/operator. The only exception to this is when the pipeline contains "sour gas" (hydrogen sulfide) because of its potential toxicity at certain levels.

## Air Quality and Air Pollution

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) handles all complaints regarding air quality and air pollution. For more information on TCEQ's role, please visit their website by scanning the QR code below.



<https://www.tceq.texas.gov/assistance/industry/oil-and-gas/oilgas.html>

## Noise, Lighting and Odors

The RRC does not regulate noise, lighting or odor issues. Noise and lighting issues are governed by local ordinances.

The TCEQ has jurisdiction over odor. You can visit the TCEQ website for more information about how to file odor complaints and obtain information about air contaminants related to oil and gas facilities. For a well within the city limits, the city may enact ordinances regarding odors or other nuisances.



[https://www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints/odor\\_complaint.html](https://www.tceq.texas.gov/compliance/complaints/odor_complaint.html)

## Property Rights, Mineral Interests and Leasing

The RRC has no authority over property rights, leases, mineral rights and royalty matters. These are private legal matters that may require legal counsel. However, the Commission provides resources regarding mineral rights and royalties on these webpages:

### Oil & Gas Exploration and Surface Ownership



<https://rrc.texas.gov/about-us/faqs/oil-gas-faqs/oil-gas-exploration-and-surface-ownership/>

### Frequently Asked Questions



<https://rrc.texas.gov/about-us/faqs/royalties-faq/>

## Roads and Traffic

The RRC does not regulate roads or traffic. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and local

governments, such as cities and counties, have jurisdiction over roads. Oil and gas permits issued for exploration, production and waste disposal do not override the authority of those transportation



## Can the Railroad Commission interpret data for me?

The RRC provides access to data through its Online Research Query System, but it does not interpret data for users. These data sets are continually being updated and are made available to the public for informational purposes only.



## And what about Railroads?

The RRC no longer regulates railroads in Texas. Throughout the agency's history its duties have evolved and all rail functions have been transferred. The final rail functions were moved to TxDOT in 2005.

## Have additional questions?

Please contact [publicassist@rrc.texas.gov](mailto:publicassist@rrc.texas.gov).



## About the Railroad Commission

Our mission is to serve Texas by our stewardship of natural resources and the environment, our concern for personal and community safety, and our support of enhanced development and economic vitality for the benefit of Texans. The Commission has a long and proud history of service to both Texas and to the nation, including more than 100 years regulating the oil and gas industry. The Commission also has jurisdiction over alternative fuels safety, natural gas utilities, surface mining and intrastate pipelines. Established in 1891, the Railroad Commission of Texas is the oldest regulatory agency in the state. To learn more, please visit <https://www.rrc.texas.gov/about-us/>.