

## Profile of the *Clean Texas* Voluntary Environmental Program

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Over the last decade, the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission has developed a "voluntary environmental leadership program" known as *Clean Texas*.<sup>1</sup> The goal of the program has been to encourage businesses, local governments, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other groups to make commitments to improving the environment. The program is an example of an emerging trend toward the development of strategies to augment traditional environmental regulation.<sup>2</sup>

Today's *Clean Texas* program had its beginnings in four programs from the 1990s: *Clean Industries 2000*, *Clean Cities 2000*, *Clean Texas Star*, and *Clean Industries Plus*. The starting dates and goals of these programs are shown in Table 1. The new *Clean Texas* program is based on the experience gained from these earlier programs, whose target dates for achieving environmental goals were the year 2000.

The current *Clean Texas* program includes 131 charter member organizations. The program is funded by the state, and includes a two-person staff. An interesting feature of the program is the *Clean Texas* Team, designed to provide support in planning and implementation of the program. This team is made up of at least 16 members—eight from each of the strategic planning areas of the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission, and the other eight representing the various *Clean Texas* membership categories (described below), small business, non-governmental organizations, institutions, and political subdivisions. The charter members of the *Clean Texas* Team were announced February 2001 at the Partnerships for A Livable Texas Conference.

*Clean Texas* aims to provide incentives and public recognition to organizations that commit to specific environmental goals.

Table 1. Precursors to the *Clean Texas* Program

Program name	Start date	Main goal(s)
<i>Clean Industries 2000</i>	1992	reduce toxic release inventory emissions and other hazardous waste by 50% by 2000
<i>Clean Cities 2000</i>	1994	reduce local solid waste generation and promote market development for recyclables
<i>Clean Texas Star</i>	1995	reduce solid waste from small businesses and service sector
<i>Clean Industries Plus</i>	1998	encourage commitments in environmental management systems, product stewardship, and community participation

The three levels of membership offered, in increasing order of environmental commitments required and benefits accrued, are Advocate, Partner, and Leader (Table 2). The appropriate membership category for an organization joining the program is dependent not only on the level of commitment and benefits desired, but also on the nature of the organization. For example, community groups, non-profits, and other entities that do not operate from a specific physical location can participate at the Advocate level, which requires that the group: (1) support an environmental community outreach project and (2) promote the *Clean Texas* program and related activities. A pollution abatement goal, such as emissions reduction, is not applicable in this case. On the other hand, businesses, industries, and agencies operating from a physical site are eligible to participate at the Partner or Leader level. The Partner level is recommended for organizations new to the program; the Leader level represents the highest level of commitment to environmental goals and results in the most benefits to businesses that participate.

As shown in Table 2, the types of environmental commitments required in this program include everything from pollution reduction and implementation of environmental management systems to community outreach and product stewardship. Key benefits to participants include use of the *Clean Texas* logo and other public recognition, networking opportunities, and

technical assistance from the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission in meeting environmental goals.

Environmental results of the *Clean Texas* program had not been analyzed at press time. However, some of the results achieved by the programs that preceded *Clean Texas* indicate what is possible with voluntary programs. For example, the more than 195 facilities that participated in the *Clean Industries 2000* program reduced toxic release inventory emissions by 50% from 1988 to 1997. Another example: The 81 *Clean Cities 2000* members divert one million tons of solid waste from landfills each year.

Voluntary environmental programs such as *Clean Texas*, which were designed as alternatives to command and control, have many potential advantages when it comes to achieving environmental outcomes, but are also subject to potential abuses. Often, the benefits and vulnerabilities are flip sides of the same characteristic. For example, the *Clean Texas* program allows members to use the *Clean Texas* label, presumably to let community members, consumers, and other businesses know that the organization is committed to environmental protection. Green labeling is an important step in marketing environmentally responsible entities, but one concern would be how to prevent the use of the *Clean Texas* label by companies that have not met their environmental commitments. A second example

Table 2. *Clean Texas* membership categories

Membership level	Types of organizations	Environmental commitments required	Member benefits
Advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• non-profits</li> <li>• community groups</li> <li>• trade associations</li> <li>• university groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote the <i>Clean Texas</i> program and member activities</li> <li>• community and environmental project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• newsletter</li> <li>• recognition at annual meeting and in newsletter</li> <li>• technical assistance</li> <li>• networking</li> <li>• use of <i>Clean Texas</i> logo</li> <li>• use of website</li> <li>• regional partnership meetings</li> <li>• discount on registration fee at <i>Clean Texas</i> annual conference</li> <li>• discounts from other members</li> </ul>
Partner	<p>first time members operating from a specific physical entity, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• businesses</li> <li>• industries</li> <li>• agencies</li> <li>• municipalities</li> <li>• universities</li> <li>• military bases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• environmental improvement goals (e.g., pollution reduction)</li> <li>• internal environmental programs</li> <li>• community environmental projects</li> </ul>	same benefits as Advocate level
Leader	<p>established members operating from a specific physical entity, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• businesses</li> <li>• industries</li> <li>• agencies</li> <li>• municipalities</li> <li>• universities</li> <li>• military bases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• environmental improvement goals, set with community support</li> <li>• internal environmental programs</li> <li>• community environmental projects</li> <li>• systems to ensure compliance and continuous improvement</li> <li>• community communication programs</li> <li>• product stewardship</li> </ul>	<p>all benefits of Partner and Advocate levels, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• additional recognition (e.g., press releases)</li> <li>• regulatory flexibility</li> <li>• customized technical support</li> <li>• priority for site assistance visits</li> </ul>

relates to the fact that a great deal of latitude is allowed participating organizations in meeting environmental goals. On the positive side, this can lead to creative, location-based solutions. On the negative side, the environmental solutions are left to the regulated. Thus, these types of programs need to include strategies for preventing and dealing with abuses.

One of the safeguards in place in the *Clean Texas* program that may address some of these concerns is that organizations joining the program must have a good compliance

history, and the program claims to maintain a “high level of baseline compliance.” Also, the period of enrollment for the program is limited to three years—presumably, organizations that do not meet their goals would not be allowed to renew their memberships. However, the renewal process is based on self-reporting by the organizations, which opens up another level of vulnerability.

Looking to the future, it will be most interesting to see how *Clean Texas* and other similar voluntary programs meet the chal-

lenges of environmental quality and ecosystem protection. Key issues of concern include the cost of such programs, whether they meet desired environmental outcomes, and whether and how they improve upon command and control regulation.

### Notes

1. Information on the *Clean Texas* program was provided by George Freda, NAEP Board of Directors (director representing Texas), and Robert Borowski and Larissa Peter, Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission. For additional information about the program: (phone) 512-239-3187; (fax) 512-239-3165; (e-mail)

rborowsk@tnrcc.state.tx.us; (web) <http://www.cleantexas.org>. As this issue went to press, *Clean Texas* was slated to receive a 2001 National Environmental Excellence Award from the NAEP (see list of other award recipients elsewhere in this issue).

2. D. A. Rondinelli, 2000, *Rethinking US Environmental Protection Policy: Management Challenges for a New Administration*, PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for the Business of Government, Arlington, Virginia, 40 pp.

*The editors welcome other articles that discuss the effectiveness of voluntary environmental leadership/management programs in the US and internationally.*

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## ***Environmental Practice's* New Managing Editor**

John H. Perkins, Editor-in-Chief

Cathy French, *Environmental Practice's* previous Managing Editor, has moved on to new opportunities after nearly three years of outstanding work. Thanks to Cathy for the wonderful work she did during her tenure, and join me in wishing her the best.

Our new Managing Editor, Debora Holmes, comes to us straight from the Master of Environmental Studies program at The Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington, where she is receiving her Masters in 2001. She holds undergraduate degrees in English and music from Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, and did additional undergraduate work in the sciences at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota. From 1995 to 1999, Debora worked with various nonprofit organizations in Minnesota and Washington, primarily on environmental issues. She was the editor of the newsletter for alumni and students of the Graduate Program in Environmental Studies while at Evergreen, and also worked as Assistant Editor of *Environmental Practice* as a student. Her fields of interest include toxics research and invasive species issues. In her spare time, Debora enjoys the backpacking and hiking trails that the Northwest provides, along with fly-fishing, biking, and playing the piano. Please join me in welcoming Debora to the staff of *Environmental Practice*.



Debora Holmes fly-fishing at The Evergreen State College's beach, south Puget Sound. Photo by Jim Mayfield, Olympia, WA.