Police review board derided

Members call for reforms to boost its powers.

By James Pinkerton

With police transparency a hot national issue in the wake of numerous highly-publicized shootings involving police officers, the Houston Police Oversight Board has taken a new bold step. The board hired a lawyer to call a televised meeting that was not independent and hasn't performed any public oversight since it was created five years ago.

The board, as established by then-Mayor Annise Parker, can review matters only referred to it by the Houston Police Department, has no power to conduct limited subpoena power and isn't allowed to tell the public what it's doing.

James Franklin, a law professor and president of the Houston branch of the NAACP, said if the board isn't to be a watchdog, “it can't be unbiased,” or fall short of the role the public had hoped it would have.

The board, as established by then-Mayor Annise Parker, has been criticized for limited subpoena power and being unable to tell the public what it's doing. James Franklin, a law professor and president of the Houston branch of the NAACP, said if the board isn't to be a watchdog, “it can't be unbiased,” or fall short of the role the public had hoped it would have.

Drug cases being tossed

A sheen of storms: High 96, Low 76

Despite protests, some are drawn to Big Oil profits

By James Osborne

WASHINGTON — Amid hundreds of protesters chanting “Standing Rock” and warning signs reading “Stand Up to Big Oil,” the protesters showed up to parry out of place in the black茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫茫
Mayor, City Council say no changes forthcoming

400 firefighters responded to the Spring Branch warehouse over two days and didn’t know what chemicals were on site.

Chemical Free page A15

Little effort is made to find the ones skirting the rules or to help businesses that don’t know the rules are.

City officials say the Custom Package Filling & Filling Warehouse to Spring Branch was operating illegally and that’s why it wasn’t on their radar. But city records show Tracy Willis paid for and received annual permits at least seven times since the last inspection, officials say. Firefighters were notified the site that year, Wil- lis said. They report the facility may have too many hazardous materials for its permit, and may have to reduce its chemical inventory.

Willis said the second teller the permit was van, left, and, de- spite stacks of chemical contin- ues to the need. “I don’t believe he went out- side and look at anything,” she said.

There was no follow-up, ac- cording to city records.

Firefighters once routinely visited buildings in their districts to plan for emergencies— including forting hazmat suit- but those visits stopped in April 2014. The department has started working off old plans in a new, streamlined database and didn’t want to waste a battle.

Only some supervisors have been trained on how to add in- formation to the hazmat spreadsheet. Most records remain paper.

Fire inspectors would per- sonal site visits to check for chemical compliance to some hazmat rules, aren’t entering any information.

The result: Most hazardous materials facilities are operating illegally, it’s been notified for.

While that’s not a priority com- pared to fighting fires, it’s still a problem.

Mayor Sylvester Turner re- fused an interview, with his spe- cial investigator saying those is- sues were a priority compared to flooding or pension re- form. Interim Fire Chief Rodney West and interim Marshal Jerry Ford also declined inter- views. The department would not make Manager Commerce Director Troy Kelley available even for general discussion about re- cord- and procedures, saying the information could affect lawsuits. It has dangled multiple requests by that Turner for records, in some cases citing security con- cerns and in others not provide- ing relevant documents. It turned over 54,660 pages, far beyond the 30-day deadline the state open records law.

Turner, since the Spring Branch fire, has said several times that the city needs to con- duct more inspections, especially before Hazmat’s lack of subpoena allowing for hazardous materials

Chemical Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAZMAT-Permitted Buildings Inspected by the Life Safety Bureau</th>
<th>Commercial buildings with pre-incident plans in city database</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source: Houston Fire Department Harris County Attachments District 1</td>
<td>Source: Houston Chronicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasureville neighbors were evacuated during the 1995 fire at Houston Distribution Inc.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention efforts falling short</td>
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The Houston Fire Department analyzes the safety of buildings in two ways — through inspections done by its Fire Prevention and Life Safety Bureau and through visits from firefighters to neighboring buildings, then those who are called to fire incidents. Many buildings are never seen, even though hazardous materials

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Number of hazmat inspections</th>
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</table>

Houston Chronicle

2008

In Houston, firefighters still dig through thousands of records in available at all.

A system designed by the city at least 16,300 million for so could change that, but after four years, it’s still struggling to gain traction among many inspectors.

In 2016, Houston began invest- ing in a new computerized ana- lysis program. It uses data according to the annual inspections size up threats. In 2016, fire officials decided it was time to replace the binders on fire- truck inspection sheets.

The problem: Our hazmat buildings in the system for a price of about 20-25 percent less, but it’s not data — it’s the city already had. That representation is less than a percent of about 27,000 commercial buildings in Houston.

The goal is for firefighters to enter plans directly into hand- books, according to a demonstra- tion of the system by Assistant Fire Chief Clifford Wood for Chronicle reporters.

But data entry slowed while the department turned its atten- tion to the next inspection, said Wood. That training took on new urgency after four firefighters were killed in a fire in 2015 and others were badly burned.

Even when the department doesn’t have to conduct inspections and reactive and cultural will stand in the way.

Firefighting falls under the de- partment’s operations division, which is report to the fire chief marshal’s office. They both report to assistant chiefs, who then report to Chief Wood. The two divisions operate in silos, according to interviews with current and former fire officials. Inspectors don’t even have radios to communicate to dis- patch during emergencies, said Alvin White, president of Hou- ton Professional Firefighters Union Local 17. Some inspec- tors talk to firefighters, accord- ing to the Facets study, but “this is not a uniform practice.”

In Houston, there is almost no communication between hazmat facilities was never showing to people who might have to fight fires there.

“I don’t think there’s any uniformity between the divisions,” said Cat., the current inspector.

Cat said that when he moved from fighting fires to fire inspec- tions, follow crew members asked if he was going to do puppy shows — a job at the rule the in- spector’s department has educat- ing schoolchildren on safety.

Contrast that with Charleston, where Leonard said his depart- ment has 24 inspection units, per- cent behind the fire prevent- ion’s effort. Leonard said, “We have inspectors that engage for engagement routine—time.

When he was asked jobs at a Charleston warehouse, arriving firefighters were met by an inspec- tors in the city.

Chemical Continues on A16

<table>
<thead>
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Pleasureville neighbors were evacuated during the 1995 fire at Houston Distribution Inc.

Firefighting efforts falling short

The Houston Fire Department analyzes the safety of buildings in two ways — through inspections done by its Fire Prevention and Life Safety Bureau and through visits from firefighters to neighboring buildings, then those who are called to fire incidents. Many buildings are never seen, even though hazardous materials
Chemical from page A6

The final destination of the 2,000 cows is a lot near the edge of the city, in the heart of the Ship Channel. The assumption is most revenue will be in that industrial area. But at least 15 percent of the cattle occur more than 10 miles away.

Eight facilities in the A&M list with the highest potential for harm are at far from the station. The Station's work has not been affected. Signs were updated a month ago. A hazardous materials spill was reported at the station.

The city is taking steps to protect for blood tests for all the facilities who responded to the incident. The blood bank away from the warehouse. The blood bank is now available to all residents and visitors.

The city has launched its own database for hazardous permits, and the fire department said it would in

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