



The Senate of Texas

CÉSAR J. BLANCO

TEXAS SENATOR
DISTRICT 29

August 27, 2026

The Honorable Brooke T. Paup
Chairwoman
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
P.O. Box 13087
Austin, Texas 78711-3087

RE: Follow-Up Regarding Marathon El Paso Refinery Emissions Events and Community Notification

Dear Chairwoman Paup:

Thank you for your leadership of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. I also want to express my appreciation for your team's accessibility and communication with my office regarding the recent emissions events at the Marathon El Paso Refinery and other concerns related to the facility. TCEQ staff have been responsive to our questions and willing to provide information as the agency's investigation continues, and I appreciate their continued engagement.

My primary concern remains the health and safety of the surrounding community and ensuring residents receive timely, accurate, and understandable information when an emissions event occurs.

Marathon's subsequent reporting materially changes the public's understanding of the August events. The final reports indicate approximately 15.4 tons of pollutants were released across the reported incidents, with one event continuing for more than 68 hours and involving a broader range of contaminants than initially reported. I recognize that initial emissions estimates are preliminary and can change as additional information becomes available. However, the scale of these changes raises an important question about whether our current notification framework provides communities with sufficient information while an event is still unfolding.

This is particularly important given reports from nearby residents describing strong odors and physical symptoms during the incident. While those reports alone do not establish the cause or level of exposure, when residents are questioning whether it is safe to remain in their homes, they

should have clear information about what is known, what remains unknown, and what precautions, if any, they should consider.

I have attached additional questions for TCEQ's consideration as the investigation proceeds. I am also interested in working with the agency on how we can improve communication during future incidents. Marathon has publicly indicated that it is working with City and County officials on an improved community notification system. I believe there is an opportunity to build upon that work and ensure the needs and experiences of surrounding communities help inform the final approach.

To that end, I intend to convene a community conversation focused on refinery safety, air quality, and public notification. I would welcome TCEQ's participation so residents can better understand the agency's role and so we can hear directly from the community about where communication can be improved.

My goal is not to prejudge TCEQ's investigation or the separate contested case involving Air Quality Permit No. 18897. It is to ensure we learn from this incident, provide the community with answers, and identify practical improvements that better protect and inform El Pasoans moving forward.

Thank you again for your continued accessibility and partnership. I look forward to working with you and your team.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cesar J. Blanco". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cesar" being more prominent and the last name "Blanco" following in a similar style.

César J. Blanco
Texas State Senator
Senate District 29

Attachment: Follow-Up Questions Regarding Marathon El Paso Refinery Emissions Events



The Senate of Texas

CÉSAR J. BLANCO

TEXAS SENATOR
DISTRICT 29

Office of Senator César J. Blanco

Follow-Up Questions for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Emissions Reporting and Cause

1. What accounts for the differences between Marathon's initial emissions estimates and the quantities, duration, and pollutants identified in its subsequent reporting? Does TCEQ consider the magnitude of these revisions typical for an event of this nature?
2. At what point did TCEQ become aware that the duration, quantity, or composition of the emissions differed materially from the initial reports? As the understanding of the event evolved, what additional information, if any, was communicated to local officials or the public?
3. Marathon identified an electrical issue as the initiating cause of the Fluid Catalytic Cracking Unit shutdown. What specifically failed, and is TCEQ reviewing whether the equipment involved had experienced previous failures, maintenance concerns, or other warning signs?
4. Is TCEQ evaluating whether the initial equipment failure, subsequent process upset, restart procedures, or resulting emissions could reasonably have been prevented or mitigated through different maintenance, operational, or emergency procedures?

Monitoring and Public Health

5. What specific monitoring data was used to assess conditions in surrounding communities during the event? Where were monitors located relative to the refinery, nearby neighborhoods, and prevailing wind direction during periods of highest emissions?
6. Which pollutants ultimately identified in Marathon's final reporting were directly measured through available community or fenceline monitoring? For pollutants that were not directly measured, how was potential community exposure assessed?
7. Has TCEQ independently reviewed Marathon's underlying monitoring data, emissions calculations, sampling methodology, equipment calibration, and meteorological information?

8. How does TCEQ incorporate odor complaints and reports of physical symptoms from nearby residents into its assessment when available ambient monitoring does not identify concentrations above established health-based guidelines?

Community Notification

9. Does TCEQ have criteria for determining when the duration, changing composition, or evolving estimated magnitude of an emissions event warrants additional public notification, even when an immediate health risk has not been established?
10. During a prolonged event, what entity is responsible for communicating updated information to residents as the understanding of the event materially changes?
11. Would TCEQ be willing to participate with the City of El Paso, El Paso County, Marathon, local emergency management and public-health officials, and community stakeholders in identifying improvements to the community notification framework currently being developed?

Compliance and Enforcement

12. Is TCEQ reviewing Marathon's previous emissions events, equipment failures, and compliance history in determining whether the August events represent an isolated incident or may indicate recurring operational or maintenance concerns?
13. What criteria will TCEQ use to determine whether these events were avoidable and whether Marathon took all reasonable measures to minimize emissions? If violations are identified, how will Marathon's compliance history factor into potential corrective or enforcement action?

Pending Air Permit

The Senator recognizes that TCEQ's investigation and the contested case involving Air Quality Permit No. 18897 are separate proceedings and is not asking the Commission to prejudge either matter.

14. If the investigation identifies violations, inadequate controls, maintenance deficiencies, or other operational concerns relevant to the pending permit, what process exists for those findings to be appropriately considered in connection with the permit renewal?
15. Could findings from the investigation result in additional monitoring, reporting, notification, control, or operational requirements being considered for the facility?
16. If information developed through the investigation is relevant to issues presently before SOAH, how and when would that information become part of the appropriate administrative process?