

GUEST ESSAY

Sound off on rock crushing

By TERRY WILSON

The Texas House of Representatives Interim Study Committee on Aggregate Production Operations is looking for your input. Every even-numbered year, the Texas Legislature assembles study committees to examine issues brought up in the previous legislative session that require more research and discussion. Those committees issue reports upon which future legislation can be built.

This term, I was asked to chair the House Interim Study Committee on Aggregate Production Operations.

For those living near APOs, the need for a study on how the state regulates and inspects their operation is clear, but for those who aren't familiar with them, here's a brief overview.

APOs dig up rock (around here, usually limestone) and sand deposits, which they then crush to sizes ranging from large gravel to ultra-fine powders used in cosmetics, with the largest share of their production dedicated to producing the materials needed for concrete. Some APOs even mix concrete and asphalt on site.

Growth drives rock crushing

As Texas continues to grow, so does the need for APOs to produce the concrete that builds our homes, businesses, and the infrastructure connecting them. However, as the APOs have sought out new geological deposits to utilize, their expansion along with the expansion of our cities and communities have become increasingly in conflict.

Blasting and industrial noise that was not an issue when the nearest resident was miles away suddenly becomes a major issue if a new mining operation is put within range of an existing and expanding community. Dust clouds that once covered grass and trees now come rolling in over homes, schools and hospitals.

Rules and procedures that once worked fine now produce friction between the industry and communities. We now have the opportunity to develop new policy to meet the needs of both industry and the public

while avoiding adverse impacts.

The House APO Committee contains members of the Texas House and leaders within the Texas APO industry. We are tasked with finding solutions that will allow for that growth to continue without lowering our quality of life in Central Texas.

As part of that work we will be taking testimony from citizens about their experience with APO-related issues. This will be added to interviews with experts, agencies, and interested organizations in assembling a final report and recommendations to the 87th Texas Legislature.

Normally, we would take this testimony in person during a public hearing at the Texas Capitol. However, with the Capitol building closed to the public because of the pandemic, we will instead be taking written testimony by email.

If you wish to send testimony to the committee, please email it to our committee clerk at jeff.frazier_hc@house.texas.gov. We ask that you send in your testimony before October 30.

Additionally, I will host a series of informal online town halls on APO issues later this month, bringing together industry, academic and state agency experts.

Rock crushing town halls

• **September 29, 9 a.m.** — Examining the impact of APO industry on the Texas economy, and impact of potential regulations on APOs and construction costs.

• **September 30, 9 a.m.** — Examining environmental, quality of life and infrastructure issues faced by communities near APO sites.

• **October 1, 9 a.m.** — We will hear from members of the public.

Dates and times may change. Please check my Facebook page for changes and to view the events <http://www.facebook.com/TerryWilsonPage>. I look forward to hearing from and seeing y'all soon.

Terry M. Wilson, Colonel U.S. Army, retired, is state representative for Texas House District 20. He chairs the House Interim Study Committee on Aggregate Production Operations.
