

- SUBJECT:** Creating Texas Task Force 1 Type 3 in the Rio Grande Valley
- COMMITTEE:** Homeland Security and Public Safety — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Pickett, Fletcher, Dale, Flynn, Kleinschmidt, Lavender, Simmons
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — Cortez, Sheets
- WITNESSES:** For — Shawn Snider, Rio Grande Valley Regional Response Group and Edinburg Fire Department, (*Registered, but did not testify:* Lon Craft, Texas Municipal Police Association)
- Against — None
- On — Nim Kidd, Texas Department of Public Safety-DEM; Billy Parker and Gary Sera, Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code, sec. 88.302, establishes Texas Task Force 1, an urban and water search and rescue team capable of national deployment. Task Force 1 is based in College Station and is administratively attached to the Texas A&M Extension Service. It is under the command of the Governor's Division of Emergency Management. Task Force 1 is made up of more than 540 emergency response personnel from 68 organizations and departments across the state. It consists of three deployable 70-member teams divided into five components: command, rescue, medical, logistics planning, and search.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 1090 would create Texas Task Force 1 Type 3. It would be a regional version of Task Force 1 and would be headquartered in the Rio Grande Valley. Task Force 1 Type 3 would operate, train, respond, and function under Texas Task Force 1.
- Its training and assistance capabilities would be substantially equivalent to the training and assistance capabilities of Task Force 1. Task Force 1 Type 3 would work in the areas of building collapse, search and rescue, swift

water rescue, hazardous material response, public works strike team response, heavy transportation extrication, public safety, and others.

The members of Texas Task Force 1 Type 3 would be responsible for any costs and expenses related to the operation, training, and equipment of the task force, including the procurement and maintenance of equipment and supplies. These members could be reimbursed for their expenses in the same manner as members of the statewide Texas Task Force 1.

CSHB 1090 would amend the state's workers' compensation statute to extend coverage to Texas Task Force 1 Type 3 members.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2013.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1090 would locate a regional response search-and-rescue task force in the Rio Grande Valley, which is the area of Texas most vulnerable to hurricanes. The Valley is too far removed from the rest of the state to fully count on assistance from Texas Task Force 1 in times of emergency, nor can it fully contribute to task force missions. The Valley's combination of low-lying areas and flood prone highways means it should have its own task force to deal with emergency search and rescue in the event it is cut off from the rest of the state.

According to the Legislative Budget Board, CSHB 1090 would have no cost to the state. Under HB 1090, local governmental members of Texas Task Force 1 Type 3 would be responsible for any costs and expenses related to its operation and training. These members would be eligible for reimbursements if state or federal emergency disaster funds were issued to help with any particular response.

CSHB 1090 would confer a number of organizational benefits that would not be available without the creation of this regional response unit. Its presence would create a clear and formal channel for interagency cooperation in the Valley, which would help consolidate and formalize existing personnel and resource-sharing agreements. In addition, the bill would place this regional organization within the larger statewide structure, finally allowing the Valley to efficiently contribute emergency response resources to the rest of the state in a time of need. Finally, by being part of the larger, statewide task force, Texas Task Force 1 Type 3

would have better access to coordinated training opportunities that could otherwise be unavailable.

Unlike other far-flung areas of the state, the Rio Grande Valley's population is rapidly growing. Texas should deploy resources where they are most needed, and the Valley's population boom combined with its vulnerable geography make this region the best choice for the establishment of a regional emergency response task force.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 1090 is unnecessary and simply would create the title of Texas Task Force 1 Type 3. The public safety and emergency response agencies in the Rio Grande Valley already have access to federal emergency disaster training funds, including Federal Emergency Management Agency grants. Existing emergency response agencies already may train with Texas Task Force 1 in College Station.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The bill should establish regional task forces in other remote areas of the state, not just the Rio Grande Valley. Texas Task Force 1 members are required to be ready to deploy with six hours' notice. Currently, agencies from the Panhandle, far West Texas, and the Rio Grande Valley cannot mobilize within that time frame because they are too far removed from the rest of the state. If it makes sense to base and train a regional task force in the Rio Grande Valley, it would be prudent to follow suit in other parts of the state.

NOTES:

The committee substitute differs from the bill as filed in that it would hold the local governmental members of Texas Task Force 1 Region 3 Rio Grande Valley responsible for any cost or expense related to the operation, training, and equipment of the task force and would make these members eligible for reimbursement.