

SUBJECT: Allowing RRC to use drones for inspection of certain oil and gas sites

COMMITTEE: Energy Resources — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Goldman, Anchia, Craddick, Darby, Geren, T. King, Leman, Longoria, Reynolds

0 nays

2 absent — Herrero, Ellzey

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jimmy Carlile, Fasken Oil and Ranch; Cyrus Reed, Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club; William Stevens, Panhandle Producers and Royalty Owners Association; Ben Shepperd, Permian Basin Petroleum Association; Lon Burnam, Public Citizen; Jason Modglin, Texas Alliance of Energy Producers; Ryan Paylor, Texas Independent Producers & Royalty Owners Association (TIPRO); Suzanne Mitchell)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Alexander Schoch, Texas Railroad Commission)

BACKGROUND: Government Code sec. 423.002 lists certain circumstances under which it is lawful to capture an image using an unmanned aircraft, including for oil pipeline safety and rig protection, by the operator of a pipeline for inspection and maintenance, or by an electric or natural gas utility or a telecommunications provider in certain situations.

DIGEST: HB 2957 would expand the lawful use of an unmanned aircraft to include capturing an image by the Railroad Commission in connection with the inspection and examination of:

- an oil or gas site or facility, including a well, tank, or disposal or injection site;

- a pipeline facility; or
- a surface mining site.

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, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 2957 would provide the Railroad Commission (RRC) with a tool to improve inspections of oil and gas facilities under its regulatory authority. Under current law, RRC already can use drones to capture images at the scene of a spill of hazardous materials, in connection with oil pipeline safety and rig protection, and for the purposes of fire suppression. However, current law does not explicitly authorize RRC pipeline and surface inspectors to use drones for inspection purposes.

By permitting RRC to use drones for inspection purposes, the bill would ensure the commission could complete more regular and efficient inspections of oil and gas facilities by allowing inspectors to more quickly access sites, gather better data, including a more complete picture of sites, and decrease inspection turnaround times.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

No concerns identified.