

Texas Chemical Council Antitrust Policy Statement

Updated 2023

I. INTRODUCTION

It is the practice of the Texas Chemical Council (“the Council” or “TCC”) and its members to comply strictly with all laws, including federal and state antitrust laws that apply to TCC operations and activities. Compliance with the letter and spirit of the antitrust laws is an important goal of TCC and is essential to maintaining the Council’s reputation for the highest standards of ethical conduct.

The procedures discussed below update TCC’s continuing antitrust compliance efforts and are to be observed by each of you—TCC officers, members, and other persons—who may be involved in any way in TCC’s operations and activities. While TCC General Counsel’s Office has been assigned to oversee TCC’s antitrust compliance efforts, those efforts fall short unless each of us does our part.

II. THE ANTITRUST LAWS: A BASIC FRAMEWORK

Antitrust laws are designed to promote vigorous and fair competition, and to provide American consumers with the best combination of price and quality. These procedures focus mainly on the federal antitrust and trade regulation laws created by the Sherman Act, Clayton Act, Robinson- Patman Act and Federal Trade Commission Act. Most states and the District of Columbia have their own antitrust laws, which frequently (although not always) parallel the federal laws.

The U.S. Department of Justice is authorized to prosecute Sherman Act violators as criminal felons, who may be severely fined and, in the case of individuals, imprisoned. In addition, the Justice Department, state attorneys general and private parties may bring civil suits and recover three times (treble) their actual damages, court costs and (in private suits) their attorneys’ fees from corporations and individuals who have violated the federal antitrust laws. The Federal Trade Commission has its own statutory authority to enforce antitrust laws through civil and administrative proceedings.

III. POSSIBLE ANTITRUST VIOLATIONS TO AVOID

1. Agreements That Restrain Competition—Section 1 of the Sherman Act

The most common antitrust violations of which you should be aware fall within Section 1 of the Sherman Act. They result from agreements—typically with competitors, customers or suppliers—that unreasonably restrain competition. Thus, the antitrust laws prohibit TCC and its members from agreeing to do certain things that they could legally do if they acted independently.

Any type of agreement, understanding or arrangement between competitors, whether written or oral, formal or informal, express or implied, that limits competition is subject to antitrust scrutiny. Moreover, any attempt to reach such an agreement may be unlawful, even if it is unsuccessful.

2. Some Troublesome Agreements

The courts have found that certain types of agreements always (or almost always) violate the

antitrust laws. They include agreements of the kinds discussed here.

Price-fixing and bid-rigging agreements. Any agreement between competitors on prices charged to others for products or services violates the antitrust laws. Every direct price-fixing agreement is illegal, whether it is meant to raise, lower or just stabilize prices. Agreements may be illegal as well even if they only indirectly affect prices because they involve such things as discounts, promotional allowances, standardization of customer or delivery services, or uniform credit terms and billing practices. It is also illegal for competitors to agree on the prices they will pay for products or services sold by other persons, or to engage in collusive bidding practices (or “bid rigging”).

Agreements to allocate markets, customers, territories or products. It is illegal for competitors to agree to divide or allocate customers or territories. An agreement among competitors is also illegal if it provides that they will refrain from selling a certain product generally, or in any geographic territory or to any category of customer.

Group boycotts and collective refusals to deal. Agreements among independent concerns that they will boycott or refuse to buy from particular suppliers or sell to particular customers are generally prohibited by the antitrust laws. This does not necessarily preclude sharing certain information about a supplier or customer (e.g., concerning its credit history) so long as there is no discussion on whether to deal with it.

Agreements to control production. Agreements among competitors to increase or restrict services or production levels are always problematic under the antitrust laws. The same is true of agreements among competitors to limit the quality of production, restrict the products or services sold to a particular customer, refrain from introducing new products and services or eliminating old ones, or accelerate the introduction or withdrawal of a product or service.

Tying Arrangements. A “tie-in” or “tying” arrangement permits a buyer to purchase one (tying) product or service only if it agrees to buy a second, distinct (tied) product or service from the seller. These types of agreements should be avoided.

3. Safer topics of discussion include discussion of non-price and compensation related interventions that businesses have implemented/ are considering (ex. Mandatory safety precautions, strategies for protecting employees, and pros/cons of different approaches).

ACTIVITIES THAT ILLEGALLY RESTRAIN COMPETITION

TCC operations and activities must not be used to reach or further agreements among members (or other persons) in any of the following areas:

TCC's or members' prices for products or services

Allocations of markets, customers, territories or products

Collective refusals to deal with anyone

Limitations on production

Tying arrangements

To avoid even the appearance of impropriety, the subjects indicated above must not be discussed or addressed in the course of any TCC-related operations, events or other activities without the prior approval of counsel.

3. Other Types of Agreements That Also May Raise Concerns Under the Antitrust Laws

Here are some examples, list not exhaustive, of agreements whose legality depends on the circumstances involved.

Exclusive Dealing. Exclusive dealing arrangements come in various forms. Some might require a customer to sell exclusively the products of a particular company or coerce a supplier into refusing to sell to its customer's competitors. Others might compel a customer to purchase all of its requirements for a particular product or service from a single supplier.

Reciprocity. In a reciprocal dealing arrangement, a customer makes purchases from a supplier only on the condition that the supplier will buy products or services from the customer. Such reciprocal arrangements are particularly troublesome when they are openly or implicitly coerced.

Product standardization. Competitors may create lawful agreements to establish industry product standards. Those agreements may cause problems under the antitrust laws, however, if they have an anticompetitive effect (e.g., where standardization makes it easier for competitors to set common prices).

Resale price agreements. An agreement between a seller and a customer on the price at which the customer will resell a product is frequently problematic. The seller may, however, suggest a resale price so long as it is completely clear that the customer is free to accept or reject the suggestion, and will not be penalized if it decides to disregard the suggestion.

ACTIVITIES THAT ALSO MAY BE ILLEGAL, DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES

TCC operations and activities must not be used to reach or further agreements among members (or other persons) in any of the following areas without the prior approval of counsel:

Exclusive dealing arrangements

Reciprocal sales and purchase arrangements

Product standardization

The prices at which products or services should be resold

To avoid even the appearance of impropriety, the subjects indicated above must not be discussed or addressed in the course of any TCC- related operations, events or other activities without the prior approval of counsel.

4. Other Conduct That May Violate the Antitrust Laws Even Without an Agreement of Any Type

You should also be aware of antitrust law violations that may take place even where there is no agreement among competitors or anyone else. The most common violations of that type are briefly discussed here.

Monopolization. The law of monopolization (including attempts to monopolize and agreements to monopolize) is extremely complicated. Basically, when any enterprise enjoys a strong market position for a particular product, it should be concerned about questions of monopolization. The law of monopolization often comes into play in mergers or acquisitions for companies that actually compete or could compete with each other. No enterprise should take actions that might be viewed as evidence of intent to acquire or maintain monopoly power in a particular market, to drive a particular competitor out of business, or to prevent somebody from entering the market.

Price Discrimination. The Robinson-Patman Act and some state antitrust laws restrict a seller from charging different prices for its goods to competing customers at the same point in time. Those laws also forbid sellers in certain circumstances to discriminate when they offer promotional materials, services or other inducements to individual customers in an effort to have the customers engage in in-house promotions or advertising. Buyers are in turn prohibited from knowingly inducing or receiving a discriminatory price, promotional allowance, or service. These general prohibitions have a number of exceptions, which are too complex to be discussed here.

Unfair Competition. The Federal Trade Commission Act (also called the “FTC Act”) prohibits all “unfair methods of competition” and “unfair or deceptive acts or practices.” The FTC Act covers antitrust violations like those discussed above, but also forbids conduct that falls short of those violations. The FTC Act prohibits all forms of deceptive or misleading advertising and trade practices, such as disparaging a competitor’s product, harassing a customer or competitor, and stealing trade secrets and customer lists.

IV. ANTITRUST MATTERS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES

A number of antitrust cases against professional societies and trade associations have focused on situations that go to the heart of what those organizations are about.

Membership. Because a professional society or a trade association by its very nature provides certain commercial and other benefits to its members, the denial of membership to qualified competitors of the members could violate antitrust laws. Membership should be open to all who satisfy basic membership requirements, and any decision to deny membership or expel a member should be reviewed with counsel. All persons in any class of membership should have an equal opportunity to participate in TCC activities and benefits. In addition, certain programs and activities may need to be opened to non-members if their exclusion would put them at an unreasonable competitive disadvantage to members.

Collection and Dissemination of Data. Statistical data may obviously be compiled for legitimate purposes. Statistical information also may cause problems from an antitrust standpoint, however, if their use somehow harms competition. This might happen, for instance, if statements in TCC publications were to suggest what production, price, or specific market demand should or would be in the future. Broadly speaking, the farther removed the data are from prices and costs, the less company-specific they are, the more historical they are, and the wider their public dissemination is, the less likely

it is that they will raise antitrust problems. As a general rule, particular market-sensitive data supplied by individual members should never be discussed or disseminated beyond TCC without advice of counsel.

Codes, Standards and Certification Programs. Reasonable industry codes, standards and certification programs may promote quite valid interests, including the protection of safety, health and the environment and the maintenance of high standards of ethics and conduct. You should nonetheless be alert for anticompetitive effects that a particular standard may have. For example, a product standard that is unreasonably biased in favor of one manufacturer's product at the expense of another's may raise significant antitrust problems. Care should therefore be used both in creating and applying codes, standards and certification criteria, and in influencing other organizations as they do so.

Marketing and Communications. Like the other activities discussed above, marketing and communications serve valid interests, but can raise antitrust problems under some circumstances. Be careful that all advertising, announcements, and other communications that might affect competition are accurate, and are in no way deceptive or misleading. Cooperative advertising programs may be suspect if they discriminate and benefit certain members at the expense of their competitors.

Government Relations. There is a constitutional right to petition legislatures and government agencies for action, and, if properly undertaken, such activity is not subject to the antitrust laws. The right to petition, however, does not provide unlimited antitrust protection. If the activity in question is not really designed to achieve government action but rather amounts to a sham used to injure competition, for example, it may raise serious antitrust problems. Moreover, activity is not immunized from the antitrust laws simply because a government representative encourages and happens to participate in it.

V. SOME PRACTICAL GUIDELINES ON PREVENTING PROBLEMS AT MEETINGS, IN RECORDS, AND IN CONTACTS WITH OTHERS

Meetings, communications and contacts that touch on antitrust matters present special challenges. A simple example will illustrate this. Suppose that competitors were to discuss their prices at a meeting or in a document, and that their prices increased shortly afterward. A jury might view this as evidence that their discussions led to an agreement on pricing, and thus violated the antitrust laws. In a case like that, the mere appearance of illegality—even when the parties may in fact have done nothing wrong—can cause serious problems. The guidelines that follow are designed to help you not only comply with the antitrust laws, but also avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

Meetings. TCC meetings regularly bring together members and others who are potential or actual competitors. It is therefore important that certain ground rules be followed to eliminate any suspicion that a particular meeting might be used for anticompetitive purposes:

Do prepare an agenda and have TCC counsel review it before the meeting.

Do provide a copy of "Texas Chemical Council: Antitrust Compliance Guidelines" to every participant at the meeting.

Do have a TCC staff member attend the meeting.

Do invite legal counsel to attend if the meeting might involve matters having to do with competition.

Do follow the agenda at meetings, with departures from the agenda only if counsel approves.

Do keep accurate minutes, and have counsel review them before they are put into final form and circulated.

Do not discuss any subjects that might raise antitrust concerns (including prices, market allocations, refusals to deal, and the like) unless you have received specific clearance from counsel in advance. If somebody begins discussing a sensitive subject, do not allow the discussion to continue. If the discussion does continue, do not allow the meeting to continue.

When members get together and talk before or after formal meetings, there should be no discussions that raise antitrust concerns even in such informal settings.

Records. When we talk about “records,” we are referring to any of the various communications people record in some tangible form every day—in documents, e-mail, videotapes, audio recordings (such as voice mail), and the like. These “records” are sometimes inaccurate, often less precise or artful than we would like, and all too frequently subject to misinterpretation. You should prepare every record with the thought that it might someday have to be produced to government officials or plaintiffs’ lawyers, who will interpret your language in the worst possible way. The following guidelines may help you avoid problems in matters involving competition:

Do avoid creating unnecessary records.

Do use language that is clear, simple and accurate.

Do avoid language that might be misinterpreted to suggest that TCC condones or is involved in any anticompetitive behavior.

Do, as much as possible, limit yourself to facts and avoid offering opinions.

Do not use language that might arouse suspicion (e.g., “For limited distribution” or “Destroy after reading”).

Do not speculate about the legality of specific conduct.

Do not hesitate to consult counsel about any non-routine correspondence requesting a TCC member to participate in projects or programs, submit data for such activities, or otherwise join other members in TCC actions.

Outside contacts. Whenever you have contact with outside parties on antitrust matters, always keep in mind that even completely innocent behavior may be misinterpreted. If a government representative, a private attorney or investigator, or any other outside person contacts you for information that might relate in some way to antitrust subjects, tell that person that you are not authorized to provide the information but will have an authorized person respond. You should then immediately contact legal counsel.

VI. RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMPLIANCE, MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT

Responsibility for Antitrust Compliance. While the TCC General Counsel will provide guidance on antitrust matters and answer questions, it is ultimately your responsibility to assure that your actions with TCC comply with the antitrust laws. You are expected to avoid all discussions and activities which may involve improper subject matter or procedures—and this includes such things as agreeing on prices, on how to allocate markets or customers, on placing limits on production, and on refusing to deal with certain suppliers or customers—and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

Communicating Antitrust Statement and Procedures. The TCC General Counsel will distribute a copy of these procedures to each TCC officer and committee member. TCC staff will assist in providing copies of these procedures to TCC members whose responsibilities with the Council might require knowledge of the antitrust laws.

Communicating TCC's Antitrust Compliance Statement and Procedures. The TCC General Counsel will announce the need for compliance with the antitrust laws, to TCC officers and committee members prior to all meetings, to the extent their activities might bear on TCC's compliance with the antitrust laws. In addition, all TCC officers and members are encouraged to contact the TCC General Counsel at any time with questions they may have concerning antitrust compliance.

Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement. The TCC General Counsel will monitor and audit TCC operations and activities as appropriate to help ensure compliance with these procedures and the antitrust laws in general. They will also promptly investigate any conduct that is reported or otherwise suspected to violate the antitrust laws. Any such violations may result in immediate disciplinary action, up to and including termination of membership or (for TCC employees) employment.

TCC recognizes that its own employees are an important source of information about possible antitrust violations in connection with TCC's activities. It therefore requires that employees promptly report any suspected violations of the antitrust laws. Such reports may be made anonymously. Only persons with a need to know about such reports will be advised of them. Intimidating, retaliating against or imposing any form of retribution on any employee for reporting suspected violations of the antitrust laws may result in disciplinary action, including possible termination of membership or employment, as the case may be.

VII. CONCLUSION

If you have a question about whether any of TCC's operations or activities may violate the antitrust laws, contact the TCC General Counsel. We look forward to working with you to assure that TCC, its officers and members strictly comply with both the letter and the spirit of those laws in all of our activities with TCC.