PROJECT SUMMARY

The Texas Forest Service’s processes and controls over environmental health and safety operations generally provide reasonable assurance that a safe environment exists for staff and visitors and that the Agency is in compliance with relevant laws, policies, regulations and rules. Opportunities for improvement were noted in the areas of the Texas Forest Service Safety Manual, defensive driving training, and commercial driver’s licenses.

Oversight of environmental health and safety processes is under the responsibility of the Safety Office which is part of the Human Resources Department within the Finance and Administration Division.

OBSERVATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND RESPONSES

1. Review of Safety Manual

Observation

The Texas Forest Service Safety Manual is out-of-date and does not correspond to current processes. Without current procedures, new and existing employees may not have the information needed to perform their responsibilities in adherence with requirements established by the System and Agency management. Agency management is aware the manual is out-of-date; however, the manual revision was not monitored for completion. An up-to-date safety manual helps to ensure that management’s safety expectations and procedures are communicated to employees and it assists with continuity should employee turnover occur.

Recommendation

Monitor the safety manual revision process to ensure the safety manual is periodically reviewed and updated in a timely manner.
Management’s Response

We agree with the auditors’ recommendations. We plan to have the current review and update completed by August 31, 2012.

2. Defensive Driving Training

Observation

Employees are not consistently attending defensive driving training every five years as required by the Texas Forest Service Safety Manual. The Agency uses a spreadsheet to track defensive driving training. The following information was reflected in the spreadsheet:

- Twenty-three of 98 (23%) long-time employee records lacked evidence of completing a defensive driving course while employed with the Agency.
- Twenty-eight of 75 (37%) long-time employee records lacked evidence of completing the refresher course within the last five years.
- Twenty-seven of 34 (79%) new hires were not included in the spreadsheet for tracking and did not take the required training.
- Four of five (80%) new hires included in the spreadsheet did not have evidence of completing a defensive driving course.

The Agency considers motor vehicle operation as one of its greatest hazards and has implemented a requirement for employees to attend defensive driving training. According to the Texas Forest Service Safety Manual, “All drivers must adopt a policy of defensive driving. This includes attending a National Safety Council defensive driving course each five years or within 90 days of a reportable accident or attending the TFS Driver Training Course (TFS field personnel only).” The lack of a monitoring process to ensure compliance with this requirement increases the risk of on-the-job accidents and financial liability sustained by the Agency and its employees.

Recommendation

Implement a monitoring process to ensure employees complete the required defensive driving training. Ensure new employees are included in the monitoring process.
Management’s Response

We agree with the auditors’ recommendations. We plan to utilize TrainTraq to monitor this training requirement in the same manner as other mandatory training. We plan to have TrainTraq updated and the monitoring process in place by April 30, 2012.

3. Commercial Driver’s License

Observation

Nine of 18 (50%) new hires, required to obtain or maintain a commercial driver’s license (CDL), did not obtain their CDL in a timely manner in accordance with the requirements in their position description. The Agency documents the need for a CDL and other required licenses through the employee’s position description. The position description also details the time period allowed to obtain the license. As of December 2011, three new hires had not obtained the required CDL. Without their CDL, these employees are unable to fulfill the required job duties listed in their position description.

According to the Texas Forest Service Employee Handbook, “A valid Texas commercial driver’s license is required of all TFS employees who operate trucks with a manufacturer’s rated carrying capacity of 20,000 pounds or more.” The Agency does not allow an employee to drive a vehicle requiring a CDL if the employee does not have one; however, license requirements are not monitored to determine if new employees obtain the required CDL timely. Additionally, a review of position descriptions for these employees indicated inconsistency in the time period allowed to obtain the license.

Recommendation

Ensure all employees required to have a CDL obtain the license in a timely manner. Develop a monitoring process to ensure compliance with licensure requirements outlined in specific employee position descriptions.

Management’s Response

We agree with the auditors’ recommendations. The Agency’s position description form has been updated to better identify this requirement. We plan to utilize TrainTraq to track and monitor this licensure requirement in the same manner as mandatory training.
We plan to have TrainTraq updated and the monitoring process in place by May 31, 2012.

BASIS OF REVIEW

Objective and Scope

Review the processes and controls over environmental health and safety operations at the Texas Forest Service to determine if resources are used efficiently and effectively to provide reasonable assurance that a safe environment exists for staff and visitors. Determine compliance with laws, policies, regulations and rules relevant to environmental health and safety. This review focused on the areas of employee certifications, required licenses, required safety training, safety monitoring and reporting processes, and the management team review process. Activities related to these areas were reviewed for the period September 1, 2010 to August 31, 2011. Fieldwork was conducted from December 2011 to January 2012.

Criteria

Our audit was based upon standards as set forth in the System Policy and Regulation Manual of the Texas A&M University System; the Committee of Sponsoring Organization of the Treadway Commission’s Internal Control – Integrated Framework (COSO); Occupations Code; Texas Administrative Code; Texas Forest Service Safety Manual; and other sound administrative practices. This audit was conducted in conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors’ “International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.”

Additionally, we conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

The Texas Forest Service is mandated by law to “assume direction of all forest interests and all matters pertaining to forestry within the jurisdiction of the state.” Additionally, the Agency
responds to emergency incidents (e.g., wild fires, natural disasters) throughout the state and is also tasked by the Governor's Division of Emergency Management to provide emergency response coordination and emergency response teams for natural disasters. The Agency Finance and Administration division provides oversight of the Safety Office which coordinates environmental health and safety agency-wide. The Safety Office has one full-time employee.

The Agency plays an important role in the national incident management system developed to coordinate and provide support in emergency situations. As part of this, the Agency utilizes the standards set forth by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group publication *Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualifications Systems Guide PMS 310-1* in training and qualification of its incident response personnel. Agency certification is issued annually in the form of an Incident Qualifications and Certification Card (Red Card), which certifies the individual is qualified to perform in a specified position during an incident. The National Wildfire Coordinating Group is an operational group designed to coordinate programs of the participating wildfire management agencies.

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