

The FORUM



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Escapees Mail Service Newsletter
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Mail Fraud Protection

Properly destroying mail that may contain personal information is the best protection against possible mail fraud. Escapees has recently purchased a high-capacity, commercial-grade shredder for the purpose of shredding any mail that mail service members do not want forwarded. First Class mail is the exception; it is returned to the sender.

Escapees E-news

If you haven't signed up for these valuable e-news bulletins, you are missing out on urgent, time-sensitive updates about key RV-related issues. Messages are always kept to a minimum in both frequency and length, and we always keep PocketMail users' limitations in mind.

There is no subscriber fee, no spam, and no reason NOT to be included on this list! Just send your name, Escapees membership number and e-mail address to e-news@escapees.com, and we will sign you up immediately.

Texas Diesel Vehicle Surcharge

We have received a number of questions about the recently implemented diesel vehicle surcharge. When we started researching it, we found another example of poorly worded and executed legislation, reminiscent of the failed Texas trailer tax from last session. And, like the trailer tax, this surcharge seems to be open to interpretation by each individual county and is being applied in different ways. Here is some history to help show how we got to where we are today:

The state of Texas was handed an ultimatum by the Federal government: Clean up your air pollution problem. In 2001 Texas legislators passed bills creating the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan (TERP). They also passed some bills that created new funding sources to pay for the TERP. One ill-starred attempt was the short-lived \$225 out-of-state vehicle fee, which was struck down by the courts before anyone was actually required to pay it. There were incentive programs to encourage consumers to buy new, emissions-controlled vehicles and diesel equipment. A surcharge of one percent was levied on the sale or lease of older diesel vehicles (1996 model year or older). This made some sense: Tax older, higher-polluting vehicles and offer cash rebates for purchases of new,

cleaner-burning diesels. Unfortunately, the state paid out a number of rebates but received very little income from the surcharge. The end result is that the TERP lacked adequate funding.

In the 2003 Legislature, in an attempt to provide new funding for the TERP, the Legislature amended the existing diesel surcharge language. Their answer was to change the law so that a one-percent surcharge will be levied on the sale, lease, or use of 1997 or newer diesel vehicles over 14,000 lbs., and a 2.5-percent surcharge will be levied on 1996 or older diesel vehicles. Because of this amendment, suddenly all diesel vehicles over 14,000 lbs. were subject to some kind of surcharge at time of sale.

Currently, the only people being affected by the surcharge in Polk County are those bringing a brand-new 14,000+ lb. diesel vehicle into Texas and those current Texas residents who purchase a new or used diesel motorhome that weighs more than 14,000 lbs. The majority of new residents coming into Polk County, Texas, are not being assessed this fee on their out-of-state diesel vehicles. However, due to varying interpretations of the poorly worded law, it is possible that there will be an attempt by the State Comptroller's Office to force all counties to assess the surcharge on out-of-state vehicles as well.

The Texas Legislature does not convene again until 2005, but we have placed this issue at the top of our list. We hope that legislators never intended this tax to be applied to diesel motorhomes but rather implemented it for commercial vehicles with heavy usage. Obviously, there is no comparison because motorhomes are typically used for vacations and often out-of-state travel. We do not believe they warrant the same tax penalties as commercial trucks.

We will be tracking this issue closely and may need to call on members to write letters and send e-mails expressing their opinions on the issue. Unless a special session is called this spring, we probably need to wait until legislators return to the capitol next session to be the most effective. We'll keep you informed!

Primary 2004 Election Results

LOCAL

County sheriff:

Republican Kenneth Hammack
Democrat Billy Ray Nelson (I)

County Tax Assessor-Collector:

Democrat Marion A. "Bid" Smith (I)
Libertarian Tina Carter

Precinct 1 Commissioner:

Republican Bob Willis (I)

Precinct 1 Constable:

Republican Lester Tatum (I)*
Republican Charlie Clack *
Democrat Larry D. Wilson
*Runoff Election April 13, 2004, between Precinct 1 Republican constable candidates Lester Tatum (I) and Charlie Clack.

County Democratic Party Chairman:

Democrat Sharon Teal (I)

County Republican Party Chairman:

Republican Lowell Crew (I)

County Libertarian Party Chairman:

Libertarian Kris Overstreet (Segno)

DISTRICT

411th District Judge:

Democrat Robert Hill Trapp (I)

U.S. Representative, District 8:

Republican Kevin Brady
Democrat James Wright
Libertarian Paul Hanson

Justice, 9th Court of Appeals:

Republican Charles Kreger

State Representative, District 18:

Republican John Otto
Democrat Dan Ellis (I)

State Board of Education, District 8:

Republican Barbara Cargill

STATE and NATIONAL

President:

Republican George W. Bush (I)
Democrat John Kerry
Libertarian Michael Badnarik
Independent Ralph Nader

Vice President:

Libertarian Richard Campagna

Texas Railroad Commission:

Republican Victor G. Carrillo (I)
Democrat Bob Scarborough
Libertarian Anthony Garcia

Justice, Place 3, Texas Supreme Court:

Republican Harriet O'Neill (I)

Justice, Place 5, Texas Supreme Court:

Republican Steven Wayne Smith (I)

Justice, Place 9, Texas Supreme Court:

Republican Scott Brister
Democrat David Van Os
Libertarian Joe Izen

Place 2, Court of Criminal Appeals:

Republican Lawrence E. Meyers (I)
Libertarian Parker

Place 5, Court of Criminal Appeals:

Republican Patricia Noble
Libertarian Tom Oxford

Place 6, Court of Criminal Appeals:

Republican Michael E. Keasler (I)
Democrat J.R. Molina

Runoff Election

Only those who voted on the Republican ticket will be eligible to vote in this runoff election.

Feb. 13 First day to apply for ballot by mail
April 5 First day of early voting
April 6 Last day to apply for ballot by mail
April 9 Last day of early voting
April 13 Election Day

General Election

November 2, 2004, General Election

Oct. 4 Last day to register to vote
Sept. 3 First day to apply for ballot by mail
Oct 18 Early voting begins
Oct. 26 Last day to apply for ballot by mail
Oct. 29 Last day of early voting
Nov. 2 Election Day

Voter Resources

Polk County ballot applications fax line 936-327-6874
Polk County Clerk's Office 936-327-6804
Polk County Republican Party 936-327-8683
Polk County Democratic Party 936-327-5910
Polk County Libertarian Party 936-685-4992

On-line resources

Escapees Voter Info www.escapees.com/voterinfo.asp
Texas Voter Info www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter
www.politics.com/tx.htm
Republicans www.texasgop.org
Polk Co. Republicans www.polkcountygop.org
Democrats www.txdemocrats.org
Libertarians www.tx.lp.org
General Local News www.EastTexasNews.com