

INSIGHTS

City of Houston Tightens Local Hazardous Materials Regulations

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The early morning explosion at the Watson Grinding and Manufacturing site on January 24, 2020 continues to have an impact. The Houston City Council significantly amended the city's hazardous enterprises ordinance this week in an effort to exert more local control over the storage and use of hazardous materials in the city.

The amended ordinance contains three significant changes. First, the ordinance expands the definition of "sensitive use" beyond the childcare facilities, healthcare facilities, and schools in the prior ordinance to now also include other places where people gather such as libraries, churches, public parks, and community centers.

Second, the amended ordinance redefines "enterprise" broadly to include any use or activity both inside and outside of buildings. The expanded definition now covers the outside storage of hazardous materials that exceed the "maximum allowed quantity" for the material as defined under Section 307 of the City's Building Code.

Third, the amended ordinance establishes a new review-committee process to address applications for enterprise permits that cannot be otherwise approved under the revised ordinance. The committee is empowered to approve applications for facilities that establish effective mitigation plans to adequately safeguard the community. Effective plans must minimize risk and demonstrate that there are no reasonable alternatives to the plan proposed.

The amended ordinance complete with the changes in blackline is available [here](#).

For questions about how this ordinance or other process-safety-related issues may impact your operations please contact [Kevin Collins](#) or [Tim Wilkins](#).