

# Oil prices a 'mixed bag' in Texas

By Pam Easton  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — Texans aren't reliving the heyday of the oil boom as oil prices hover around \$50 a barrel.

In the decades since the oil boom-to-bust in the late 1970s and 1980s, Texas has worked to diversify its economy, causing it to become "less susceptible to oil price shock," said Craig Pirrong, director of energy markets at The Global Energy Management Institute at the University of Houston.

The petrochemical and airline industries will take a hit while the oil and natural gas industries experience a high, experts say.

"There will definitely be some people who will be happy," Pirrong said. "And I think for the foreseeable future the market is predicting prices well north of \$40."

Houston-based Anadarko Petroleum Corp., an independent oil and gas exploration and production company, will use money generated by the higher prices to pay down debt and return excess cash to its shareholders, said spokeswoman Teresa Wong.

"You are not going to see a lot of change in drilling activities," she said. "There is a lot of expectation by the investment community that you will outline a program and you will stick to it. You can't go out and change that on a whim with higher prices just as you can't when prices drop."

For oil companies who remember the lessons of the bust, "there is always the fear that if prices go high, they will fall," Wong said.

"It's an all-time high in terms of dollars, but when you correct for inflation the prices we saw in the mid-1970s were closer to \$100 a barrel," Pirrong said. "We are still a long way from where we were 30 years ago."

According to Baker Hughes, which tracks the number of rigs exploring for oil and natural gas in the United States, there were 165 rigs exploring for oil and 1,073 for natural gas last week compared to a year ago when there were 148 rigs looking for oil and 943 for natural gas.

"Everybody who doesn't produce oil and wants prices low," said Ray Perryman, an economist based in Waco. "It is not like everybody goes out and starts drilling oil wells like they used to. We still get some benefit within the state and clearly you will have some very big winners from it."

For companies like Houston-based Continental Airlines, higher fuel prices make a ready difficult situation worse, said spokesman Rahaan Johnson.

"Coupled with what was already a weak revenue environment, the persistent, stubbornly high cost of fuel has been challenging our effort to get back to sustained profitability," he said, adding that according to an investor update fuel costs for 2004 are expected to be \$1.13 a gallon.

Petrochemical companies are taking a hit from the high fuel costs, said Thomas Metzger, a spokesman for the American Chemistry Council.

"It is the stuff we use to make chemicals and plastics, so we are being hit twice as hard," Metzger said. "Texas is definitely one of the largest petrochemical industries that we have. In fact, it is the number one chemical producing state in the country right now, so it is going to be impacted more than any other state."

Texas produces about 20 percent of the nation's oil supply and 30 percent of the nation's natural gas, said Texas Railroad Commissioner Charles Matthews.

"There is an awful lot of activity going on everywhere," he said. "The oil and gas industry has traditionally created a lot of jobs in communities where they have oil wells being drilled, there are a lot of dollars being generated in those local economies."

And those dollars will help, he said, even if "not the boom days of the 40s and the 50s."

"Texas may be about the only place outside of the Middle East that this price of oil is good," joked Mark Baxter, director of The Maguire Energy Institute at Southern Methodist University. "You still have a lot of people walking around Texas with smiles on their faces, but for Texans as a whole, it is not as much a good, happy story as it was in the past."

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— Mark Baxter  
director of the  
Maguire Energy Institute

## Inmate's execution delay request cites problems in Houston lab

HOUSTON (AP) — Lawyers for a death row inmate asked a judge on Wednesday to postpone his pending execution because of problems at the embattled Houston Police Department crime lab.

Edward Green III, 30, is scheduled to be executed on Oct. 5 for the fatal shooting of a 72-year-old man and a 63-year-old woman in their car during a robbery 12 years ago at a Houston intersection.

The request presented to District Judge George Godwin says Green's execution order should be lifted because of questions over the reliability of ballistic testing in his case and the recent announcement that lab evidence for thousands of criminal cases had been mislabeled and improperly stored.

While Houston police have

said the evidence stored in 280 large boxes is connected to cases from 1979 to 1991, Green's attorneys say his execution should not go forward until officials have had a chance to review all of what they've found.

The evidence could include information related to Green's case that could save his life, said David Dow, director of the Texas Innocence Network, who is working with Green's attorneys.

Dow said officials do not know if the boxes contain information on cases later than 1991.

Judge Godwin did not immediately issue a ruling.

Marie Munier, chief of the trial bureau for the Harris County district attorney's office, said prosecutors have not seen Green's motion.

"Any claim we'll take a look

at it to see if there's any merit to it," she said.

The crime lab's DNA section has remained closed since a December 2002 audit revealed analysts lacked training, files were insufficiently documented and evidence might have been exposed to contaminants.

Dow said Green is the first death row inmate to seek a delay of execution based on developments at the troubled crime lab.

In an interview on Wednesday earlier Wednesday, Green told The Associated Press that he was unaware of any appeal on his behalf. Dow disputed that assertion.

"He knew we were in the middle of ongoing litigation," Dow said. "We would never do that without the inmate's consent."

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Death penalty not sought in human smuggling case

HOUSTON — A member of an alleged human smuggling gang accused in the death of 19 undocumented immigrants will not face the death penalty.

U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft filed notice Wednesday that he will not seek the execution of 24-year-old Fredy Giovanni Garcia Tobar, of Guatemala. The Houston Chronicle reported in its online edition Wednesday.

Of the other 13 people indicted in connection with what has been called the nation's deadliest smuggling attempt, Ashcroft is seeking the death penalty in only one case, truck driver Tyrone Williams. He

is the first accused smuggler in the United States to face execution.

Authorities say Garcia took Williams to a hotel where the truck driver accepted \$7,500 in cash before at least 74 immigrants were loaded into his trailer. Police discovered the abandoned trailer in May 2002 at a truck stop near Victoria. Nineteen immigrants died of dehydration, hyperthermia and suffocation.

Garcia's attorney, Nemesio Lopez, has said that his client lacks the mental capacity to understand the proceedings, and a psychiatric examination has been ordered for Garcia.

If he is ruled competent to stand trial, Garcia will be tried Nov. 29 with three others. Williams' trial is scheduled for Jan. 5.

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