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## **Radioactive Waste Disposal Facility Opens in Andrews**

Reported by: Jamie Kuras

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ANDREWS -- It's been 16 years in the making. Waste Control Specialists opened the facility that will dispose of low-level radioactive waste.

It's the first time anything like this has happened in the history of the United States. A new era in safe, permanent, cost effective disposal of low-level radioactive waste in the U.S. begins in Andrews County.

"It's gonna be great for the economic development for Andrews but it's good for the nation because we need a place to store low level nuclear waste," said Congressman Mike Conaway.

Law makers, community leaders and managers at WCS all say this wouldn't have been possible without the natural geology beneath the area and the community support in the region.

"People in the community have really stood behind it all the years and it's a great community for it," said Andrews County Judge Richard H. Dolgener.

"It was great geology." said WCS President Rod Baltzer. "They've got fantastic geologic characteristics. The weather is very arid out here, less than 16 inches of rain, more then 60 inches of evaporation is possible. So it's just a fantastic facility for us."

But it's not the nuclear waste you may be thinking of. WCS says most the waste will come from hospitals, universities and laboratories

"It's soil, it's debris from a building that came down, it's protective equipment, the suits, the glasses, the boots you might wear if you were in a hazardous environment," said Baltzer. "All that goes into drums, boxes, barrels, things like that. We take those and dispose them in these black concrete canisters."

While some still say they're nervous about disposing of the low-level radioactive waste this way, leaders and facility managers say there is now reason for concern.

"If they will come and study this process, understand the geologic advantages this site has," said Conaway, "the preparation that goes into the site, the ongoing monitoring that will be available for the site it will put their mind at rest."

The entire facility is still not open just yet. The compact facility is expected to begin accepting waste on January 3rd.

Then the federal facility that will dispose of department of energy waste is scheduled to open in the Spring.

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