

Waste Control to host grand opening today

Company leaders, politicians to attend 2:30 p.m. ceremony

By Kathleen Thurber – Nov. 10, 2011

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More than 16 years after its initial investment, Waste Control Specialists will celebrate the grand opening today of the Texas Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Compact Facility in Andrews County.

“It’s great,” said William Lindquist, chief executive officer of Waste Control Specialists, a subsidiary of Valhi Inc. “It’s been a long time coming.”

Company leaders and dignitaries, including Congressman Mike Conaway, state Sen. Kel Seliger and Rep. Tryon Lewis, will celebrate the opening of the facility with a 2:30 p.m. ribbon cutting. The public is invited to celebrate the event with a 5 p.m. barbecue at the James Roberts Center, spokesman Chuck McDonald said.

“Both the community and the company have made a commitment that we’ve worked hard to see through,” he said. “We’re going to solve a problem that’s a very real problem.” McDonald said facilities have evolved into low-level radioactive waste collection sites that were constructed for another purpose in the past.

The Texas Compact Disposal Facility was designed for the specific purpose of disposing of class A, B and C low-level radioactive waste.

Lindquist and McDonald said crews dug 100 feet below the surface, including into about 70 feet of the area’s red bed clay formation, to construct the facility. Concrete and steel was used to reinforce the area below ground, and any waste stored there will be placed inside of another concrete and steel box, McDonald said.

Lindquist added that the liner built in the ground also is 7 feet thick.

“This is a one-of-a kind, highly engineered facility,” McDonald said.

Initially, the facility was set to accept waste from generators in Texas and Vermont because they are part of a Compact Commission. The Andrews County facility now can accept applications for waste disposal from other states, although the Texas Low-Level Radioactive Waste Compact Commission must approve all petitions for disposal. Texas and Vermont governors appoint the commission’s

members.



MR T file photo

A large mining truck pulls out of a building at Waste Control Specialists during an October 2009 media tour at the Andrews facility. The facility will have its grand opening today.

Once the facility is running, Lindquist said it will bring 75 to 100 new jobs to Andrews County.

When seeking a site for the waste disposal facility, Lindquist said officials picked Andrews not only for its prime geographic location but also because of the community backing.

“We’ve got such incredible community support,” he said. “You cannot do one of these things without community support.”

Julia Wallace, executive director of the Andrews Chamber of Commerce, said most in town support WCS.

“We’re just really excited to see it finally moving forward,” she said.

“They’ve brought new employees, and they’ve been so generous to our community.”

Some have opposed construction of the facility. The site was built through \$75 million in bonds that Andrews County issued, and some disagreed with them. WCS is paying back those bonds, but voters still had to approve their issuance before the deal could be finalized.

Others argue it is an environmental hazard because it will require moving low-level radioactive waste through West Texas communities and because the waste will be sitting in the ground near where residents live.

“It’s a real sad day for us,” said Peggy Pryor about the grand opening.

Pryor and her sister Meloyde have long opposed WCS. She said they’re not convinced that the plant is a safe distance the Ogallala Aquifer. They also are disappointed construction was permitted despite environmental and health concerns.

Hearings relating to the site also garnered attention from environmental proponents in Austin who said the facility is a hazard.

Lindquist said multiple steps have been taken to ensure the facility will not affect the Ogallala Aquifer. He said the construction and operation of the facility also were done in a manner to ensure safety for employees and nearby residents.

“We operate a safe facility,” he said.

Of the facility’s space, McDonald said 70 percent will be reserved for waste generators within the Texas-Vermont Compact. The remaining 30 percent of the facility can be used to store waste from outside of the commission.

It’s estimated the facility can accept waste for at least the next 15 years and possibly longer, he said.

“In terms of the existing capacity, it’s probably in that 15- to 25-year period, and then we can obviously apply for expansions,” he said.

Lindquist said the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality is expected to finish its review process by the end of the year, and then it will simply wait on the Compact Commission to approve petitions for waste disposal.

WCS anticipates the first contracts will come from small waste generators such as universities and hospitals, he said.

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