

Federal Waste Disposal Facility Celebrates Grand Opening

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ANDREWS COUNTY - More low level radioactive waste made its way to Andrews County as Waste Control Specialists held the grand opening for their Federal Storage Site.

The company has already taken waste in the commercial part of their facility.

"This facility right here is a testament to what we can do when we work together to solve problems," Ryan Flynn, with the New Mexico Environment Department, said.

The problem being is the State of New Mexico needs to remove more than 3,000 cubic meters of waste from the Los Alamos National Laboratory Waste Storage area before June of 2014.

On Thursday, the first disposal of low level radioactive waste was made at the federal site in Andrews County.

"A lot of this waste has been stored for many, many years so this gives them an option they've been waiting for, for a long time," Elisha Sanchez, General Manager of the facility, said.

The celebration was years in the making.

"In 1991, I came out here and we looked at this ranch and bought the ranch. I thought that we'd have everything done in three years," Texas Tech University Chancellor, Kent Hance, told the crowd during the grand opening.

The idea to bring a radioactive waste facility to West Texas wasn't popular. In the last few years, lawmakers tried to put a stop to the building of the facility, claiming the public's health was at stake.

"It's been no easy road to get to this place," Charles Maguire, Director of the Texas Commission of Environmental Quality, said.

Waste Control Specialist President, Rod Baltzer, said none of this would be possible without the people of Andrews.

"The community has packed onto buses and driven to Austin multiple times, to be in front of TCEQ, to tell them they wanted a facility like this," Baltzer said.

Jay Britten, VP of Operations at Waste Control Specialists, said the concrete canisters where the waste is dumped are very safe.

"We got concrete, we got containers, we got more concrete, so in reality, the ability for any leakage is negligible," Britten said.

Waste Control Specialists has a contract with a company to make the concrete containers. By the end of the year, they expect to be able to make the containers themselves, therefore reducing cost to the company.

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