

Andrews County Considering Proposal to Store 'High-Level Nuclear Waste'

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ANDREWS - Legislators, nuclear waste specialists and more than 400 Andrews County residents gathered Monday night to discuss the possibility of storing high-level nuclear waste at a facility approximately 25 miles west of Downtown Andrews.

Waste Control Specialists (WCS) operates the radioactive waste site and is responsible for the low-level nuclear material already being treated, stored and disposed of in Andrews County.

"Fees for low-level waste have produced about \$3 million for Andrews County over the last year," said Rod Baltzer, President of WCS.

"For low-level waste, Andrews County gets five percent of our gross revenue for everything we dispose of."

He estimated high-level nuclear waste storage, if approved by community members and legislators, would generate \$10 million annually.

Low-level nuclear waste consists primarily of contaminated clothing, work gloves and other site equipment, while high-level nuclear waste would be spent nuclear fuel rods.

The rods, or "fuel pins," are long metal tubes that uranium oxide pellets or other uranium-based materials are sealed into before being placed in a nuclear reactor.

Safe treatment and storage of the spent rods would occur in 60- to 100-year cycles at the Andrews facility.

"If Andrews County and the community does not want this, it will not happen," said Baltzer.

Community concerns include "radioactive exposure, accidents and things like that," according to Senator Kel Seliger, who oversaw much of the legislation for WCS's low-level nuclear waste storage.

County-wide benefits, on the other hand, would include "cash flow and more jobs," he said.

Sen. Keliger encouraged community members at Monday night's meeting to "think carefully about all those factors" because the "decision will be made by [them]."

WCS officials said they have not filed licensing applications or taken other legislative action yet, and do not plan to do so until evaluating community reaction.

The licensing process, expected to take three to five years, would be followed by at least another year of construction and facility preparation.

High-level nuclear waste would not be transported to Andrews County until 2020 at the earliest.

"We will have open forums for community members to voice their opinions before we go ahead [with this storage proposal]," said Baltzer.

"Anybody with questions or concerns can also submit them on our website, WCSTexas.com."