

## **WCS submits information to better explain high-level nuke waste storage plan**

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Waste Control Specialists is taking steps to get its low-level radioactive waste facility west of Andrews deeper into the storage of nuclear materials.

WCS is seeking licensure from the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission to add an interim storage facility for the safe keeping of high-level radioactive waste until permanent solutions can be agreed upon.

The consolidated interim storage facility (CISF) at Andrews aims to solve a lingering problem that will only grow over time.

“In the next 20 years, between 50 and 60 nuclear power plants will be decommissioned, and we need to figure out what we’re going to do,” WCS spokesperson Chuck McDonald told the Reporter-Telegram on Wednesday, the same day it filed supplemental information to the NRC after submitting its formal, more than 3,000-page application April 28.

The Andrews facility would be temporary -- perhaps up to 100 years -- for the storage of high-level nuclear waste. The abandonment of the Yucca Mountain project put permanent storage in limbo.

Geologic storage stopped because critics were concerned that putting waste in the ground cannot be adequately monitored. Interim storage puts waste in a place where it can be monitored, McDonald said.

Yucca Mountain proponents say \$14 billion has been spent and that it’s almost ready to go. “Yucca Mountain might ultimately be where the stuff goes, but they might feel better about it 40 years from now when everybody realizes that it turned out not to be a problem, so let’s put it in the mountain we carved out and be done with it,” McDonald said.

WCS' license application is for 40 years with a 40-year extension, though nuclear waste could be moved to a place like Yucca Mountain earlier.

McDonald said there currently are more than 70,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel in the U.S. WCS wants to build an above-ground storage facility in eight phases, each taking in 5,000 metric tons of spent uranium for an eventual total of 40,000 metric tons.

There are currently 12 decommissioned nuclear plants around the U.S. McDonald said the waste is sitting at these sites and that moving it to a single location is safer and offers communities a chance to completely reclaim the land where nuclear power plants once sat.

In its supplemental information request filed with the NRC on Wednesday, WCS clarified that even though the facility would hold 40,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel, it currently is requesting licensure to store 5,000 metric tons from the 12 decommissioned nuclear facilities, where the NRC has already licensed the waste. WCS will revise its license conditions or technical specifications as necessary.

WCS also submitted information requested in preparation for its environmental impact statement.

There's more to opening a high-level radioactive waste storage facility than an application with the NRC. The application itself will take at least three years for approval. In that time, WCS needs the Texas state legislature and U.S. Congress to take action.

Just like low-level radioactive waste, the heavier stuff won't be stored for free. Andrews County and the state must determine what their cut of gross revenue receipts will be. Andrews County currently receives 5 percent of the gross paid quarterly, while Texas gets 25 percent for low-level radioactive waste storage. Since 2012, that's meant \$7.8 million for Andrews County and \$36 million for the state.

While McDonald couldn't guess how much the county and state would receive for high-level radioactive waste, he was sure it would be higher than the low-level rates. He said WCS is working with the state legislature to see this decision made either in the upcoming 2017 legislative session or in the 2019 session.

WCS is also working with Congress to get the Department of Energy to take claim of the already-existing spent nuclear fuel, which it was bound to do starting in 1998 but has failed to act on. Congress will authorize the DOE to work with private entities.

Funding for these payments will come from two sources: the \$40 billion fund paid for over the years by nuclear energy ratepayers and the \$4.5 billion taxpayer-funded Judgment Fund, which was put in place after the federal government lost a lawsuit over not meeting its legal obligation to dispose of spent nuclear waste itself. The federal government's liability increases by about \$500 million each year that it doesn't find a way to dispose of the nuclear fuel, according to a WCS handout. Liability could rise to about \$13 billion by 2020.

The spent nuclear fuel sits in dry casks and would be transported by rail. McDonald assures the public that transport of radioactive material in these casks is safe, citing one demonstration where a vessel was mostly undamaged after it was hit by a speeding locomotive and another where a cask was still safe after it was shot with a missile.

If all is approved on time, WCS would start accepting high-level radioactive waste by 2021 after construction is complete.

None of this, however, would be possible without the consent of Andrews County residents.

"These are difficult sites to get licensed, and it's not because of science or merits. It has to do with public opinion," McDonald said. "We've got a good situation out here. We've been talking with the public for 20 years. We're really good in Andrews."

WCS currently employs 220 employees in Andrews and has a \$2 million payroll.

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