



A community of quality, and home of...

...Brad & Melinda Young

Court to consider approving CDL drivers from FD from FD

The commissioners court on Monday will consider approving CDL drivers from the fire department to operate precinct equipment in the event of an emergency.

Precinct 2 Commissioner Brad Young requested the item be placed on the agenda.

The approval would enable seven members of the fire department to operate precinct trucks and equipment for fire suppression efforts in the face of an emergency.

Those firefighters include Kenneth Casbeer, Joe Harper, Cameron Hulan, Phillip Jones, Rick Parnell, Levi Price and Jesus Villa.

County equipment can be used when emergency situations arise, such as the intense fire season of 2011.

Also on Monday, the court will consider approving the second quarter invoice in the amount of \$1,783.32 for fiscal year 2017 to the Office of the Attorney General for reimbursement for services rendered for the period ending Feb. 27, 2017 under the Statewide Automated Victim Notification Services grant.

The meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m.



Andrews County News

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RELIEVER ROUTE

"...WCS does not sit atop the Ogallala Aquifer."

ANDREWS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JULIA WALLACE



WCS President Rod Baltzer addresses the crowd during Wednesday's public hearing put on by the NRC. Linda Drake/ACN

Hearing draws nuclear opponents from far away

NRC receives comments on WCS' license application to store spent fuel

By SAM KAUFMAN
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A three-hour public hearing Wednesday concerning Waste Control Specialists' desire to store spent nuclear fuel on an interim basis here drew comments from those in support and also from out-of-town groups opposing nuclear energy.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staged public hearings in Hobbs and Andrews to receive public comment on WCS' application to build and operate a consolidated interim storage facility for spent nuclear fuel at its site in far west Andrews County.

WCS is seeking to store 5,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel and greater-than-Class C waste received from stranded spent fuel storage locations and com-



mercial nuclear power reactors across the United States, according to WCS officials.

WCS, along with its part-

ners AREVA (now called TN Americas) and NAC International, submitted the application for a license to the

NRC in April 2016, followed by responses for Requests for Supplemental information

See WCS Page 5

Trustees approve second to last bond sale from \$33 million total

Approximately \$2 million will be reimbursed to GF

By SAM KAUFMAN
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The school board on Tuesday approved the second to last sale of bonds involved with the district's \$33 million rolling bond approved by voters in 2011.

The bond has enabled the district to update to 1-to-1 technology with all students and teachers receiving a device, along with meeting transportation and facility improvement needs since that time.

AISD Superintendent Bobby Azam said \$5 million in bonds have been sold and the district will actually see the money in April after authorization occurs in late



Trustee Samantha Valenzuela has filed to run for re-election.

March.

The superintendent said the funds will again be used for the intent of the bond, which is technology, transportation and facility im-

provements.

However, a portion of the \$5 million is already committed through purchases made by reserves that are required

See BOARD Page 12

Athlete injured in gym recovers from cut

School board approves fill in of glass area by basket and a mat cover

By SAM KAUFMAN
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An eighth grade middle school athlete from Pecos who sustained a major injury during a basketball game in Andrews recently is recovering, according to school officials.

The mishap occurred on Feb. 6 when the Pecos athlete ran down the middle school court and past the basket goal area. As he prepared to collide with a glass area connected with the wall he attempted to catch himself and his arm went through a glass panel, school officials said.

The athlete sustained a severe cut to his arm that left everyone in the gym with great concern for his condition.

"He was going at the right angle and the right speed," AISD Superintendent Bobby Azam said of the conditions that led to the mishap. "It got his arm and the way it cut him it didn't hit any arteries, but it was a severe cut and bled a lot. It was pretty scary for a while."

The game was cancelled following the incident.

In all of the years of basketball play at that gymnasium, no incident like it has occurred, the superintendent said. It was a "freak" type accident that likely wouldn't happen again.

The incident prompted school administrators to provide a solution for board consideration at Tuesday night's meeting to ensure there won't be any similar mishaps.

See INJURY Page 12

Court terminates lease concerning concessionaire at ACE Arena

Bid process to find another will likely be approved at next meeting

By SAM KAUFMAN
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The commissioners court on Monday terminated the county's lease with the concessionaire at the Andrews County Expo Arena.

The lease with Sugar High Bakery was scheduled to end in April, according to Precinct 4 Commissioner Jim Waldrop, but the con-

cessionaire hadn't been keeping up on monthly payments to the county.

That's why the court voted to end the contract a couple of months early, Waldrop said following the meeting.

"We terminated the contract because of lack of paying (rent)," the Precinct 4 Commissioner explained.

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from the NRC.

The company's license application was recently accepted for formal review and docketed, which led to the NRC proceeding on "two parallel tracks" involving safety issues and environmental issues.

The public hearings were part of the procedures.

A crowd of more than 150 attended Wednesday's meeting in Andrews at the James Roberts Center.

Those in attendance included members of the commissioners court, who endorsed WCS submitting the license, along with opposition groups from out of town and even out of state that handed out literature and commented against spent fuel storage at the WCS site.

WCS President Rod Baltzer provided comments in favor, as did Andrews Industrial Foundation President Lloyd Eisenrich, Andrews Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Julia Wallace and AISD Administrator Charlie Falcon, among others.

Additionally, a WCS geologist said the site is well suited for the prospect and several WCS employees spoke about their commitment to safety.

Pecos Mayor Venetta Seals expressed concern about rail safety because it would run near that city.

But Baltzer said partner AREVA has provided 5,000 shipments of similar waste without radiological releases.

"WCS anticipates that all of the fuel will arrive by rail in highly tested and extreme safe transport casks," the WCS President noted. "Our partners AREVA and NAC are global leaders in spent fuel storage and transportation."

Baltzer described the casks as being "very robust," so much so that a rocket will shred off it. He said the involved transportation is safer than oil and gas tankers coming through town.

The 20-year process would involve only one rail shipment the first year and 156 canisters annually at peak 10 years into the operation.

"There are three canisters on one rail shipment so that would be only one rail (shipment) a week," Baltzer explained.

The rail system involved in the transportation won't have waits at transfer yards and will include a security cab attached to the train with a security guard inside at all times, he added.

The three-hour hearing included an hour set aside for NRC representatives to provide a presentation of the environmental scoping process and a timeline with the licensing prospect.

The final two hours included public comment. Those who registered to comment were given three minutes.

The timeline involves receiving written comments until March 13, hearing requests until March 31 and then provision of a draft Environmental Impact State-

ment before more public hearings are staged in the spring of next year.

A safety analysis review would require 21 months and final licensing decisions would occur in 2019. Baltzer said the facility would require a year to construct and could become operational in 2021.

Even so, federal legislation that has been introduced to provide funding for interim storage of spent fuel will also require passage.

Numerous people with opposing groups were bussed in from out of town for the hearing. Some set up tables, including the We Don't Want It group.

Most were from Midland-Odessa, others from Dallas and even some from the Washington D.C. area.

"This hearing clearly got more attention from the national stage than those from before," Baltzer said. "Part of it is that they see this as a threat. Their goal is to stop nuclear and if they can clog up the waste to not have a solution, it will stop nuclear in general."

Several Andrews residents—including Humberto Acosta—spoke in opposition to the license.

Acosta and others feel spent fuel storage has risks to the community.

But others who support the plan said there is risk with anything—including nuclear-related usage in the oilfield—and that WCS is making sure to account for any risk by providing necessary safety measures and is in compliance with guidelines set forth by regulating agencies.

Opposition groups also brought up the aquifer issue and that spent fuel could remain at WCS permanently.

Pertaining to the aquifer issue, a WCS geologist said testing has proven there is nothing in close proximity to the WCS site.

"I'm not sure what data or facts they have, but they don't need data or facts," Baltzer said of opposition groups claiming the aquifer is underneath. "We need them and the NRC will look at the review."

Wallace and Baltzer both addressed the aquifer issue in their comments. The chamber manager said the aquifer is not over the site.



Brian Smith of the NRC addresses the crowd during Wednesday's hearing in Andrews.



"I want to assure all of those who have been led to believe a lie (and state) that WCS does not sit atop the Ogallala Aquifer," she said. "Those who say it does are intentionally misleading you and using fear tactics to try to persuade you to join their side."

"Over the last 20 years, WCS, local water well drillers and oil and gas producers have drilled thousands of wells and spent tens of millions of dollars to verify what's below the surface and it is not the Ogallala," she added. "They have gathered a large amount of data and using that data, the Texas Water Development Board was able to re-map the Ogallala Aquifer to accurately define the aquifer's boundary—showing that it doesn't extend to WCS' property."

Baltzer said the region

has been found "environmentally suitable" for other nuclear facilities in addition to WCS, including nearby URENCO, which was licensed by the NRC.

"The geology, site characteristics, arid environment and other factors at WCS are ideal for storage of spent nuclear fuel," he said. "WCS is not sited over any drinking water source and is 10 miles south of, and not connected to, the Ogallala Aquifer as confirmed by the Texas Water Development Board."

He also said WCS is one of the most regulated businesses in the area with licenses, permits and authorizations from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality,

the NRC, the EPA and numerous customer and contractual commitments.

"WCS has a great safety and environmental track record," he noted. "We have over 600 borings and over 400 monitoring wells are gauged, 26 air monitoring stations, numerous soil, flora and fauna samples—all showing zero environmental impact from our operations."

"We hope this allows the NRC to streamline their environmental review by relying on work that has already been done," he added.

Some in attendance also asked why WCS is now pursuing higher level waste after they said they wouldn't when they located here.

But Baltzer said federal and state authorities sought WCS as an interim solution after a permanent repository in Nevada was taken off the table following years of funding and research.

"People have asked why WCS is trying to take high level waste when we originally told Andrews County we would only take low level waste," Baltzer noted. "In 2012, the Blue Ribbon Committee appointed by President Obama said that consolidated interim storage was an important part of waste management solution."

"People approached WCS to see if we were interested in high level waste storage and we approached the local community before we decided to pursue it," he added.

Baltzer said WCS has advocated interim storage as part of an integrated waste management system to help get a permanent repository site open, whether it is Yucca Mountain or another site.

Storing the material in above ground canisters "40 to 100 years" would cool the waste down more and thermally assist in the permanent disposal process, Baltzer added.


The interim storage here would also create more jobs and revenue to the county, while serving as a key economic diversification prospect to the cyclical oil and gas industry, he noted.

The low level disposal facility has generated \$8.6 million in tax revenue to the county and the interim storage of spent fuel would likely provide significantly more, though no specific contract is in place Baltzer said.

Wallace said she heard several individuals raise concerns about terrorism—specifically that the presence of high level waste would make West Texas a target.

"Not that this is very reassuring, but the Permian Basin is a terrorist target already," she said. "We are home to one of the most prolific and longest-producing oil basins in the United States which accounts for almost 20 percent of U.S. crude oil production and a quarter of the nation's oil reserves."

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