Battery Plant Closing in Deal with Dallas Suburb

FRISCO, Texas (AP) — A battery recycling plant in a Dallas suburb will close by the end of the year after reaching a $45 million deal designed to end years of disputes over lead emissions and ground contamination, officials said Thursday.

The agreement will free up about 180 acres of undeveloped land in the heart of Frisco, one of the fastest growing suburbs in North Texas, and ends years of wrangling between Exide Technologies, once one of the largest employers in Frisco, and city officials. In recent months, backdoor arguments sometimes turned into ugly, public yelling matches at City Council meetings as Frisco officials refused to give the plant the permits it would need to meet state and federal air pollution rules.

While Exide spokeswoman Susan Jaramillo said the company was willing to fight the city to get the necessary building permits to cut emissions and any future actions it planned, Frisco's monetary offer was fair and too good to refuse. So the company will cease its Frisco operations by Dec. 31, and shortly thereafter the plant's smokestacks and many other buildings will begin to come down. About 134 people will lose their jobs, she said.

"In the short-term, we feel confident we could have won all the battles," Jaramillo said. "In the long-term, the city was making it extremely difficult for us to operate."

Exide's Frisco operations will be absorbed by the company's four other facilities in Vernon, Calif., Reading, Pa., Muncie, Ind., and Canon Hollow, Mo.

The agreement allows Frisco to deal with explosive growth, and further develop, Mayor Maher Maso said. The Dallas suburb has seen its population rise from just more than 33,000 people in 2000 to nearly 117,000 in 2010 — an increase of 254 percent.

Having 180 acres of land in the heart of the city remain undeveloped because of its proximity to the Exide plant was no longer tolerable, Maso explained, noting citizens had been vocal about their desire to see the plant shut down. The biggest concern has been for those that will lose their jobs, he said, and the city is working closely with the Texas Workforce Commission to ensure they get benefits and help finding new jobs.

"I think this worked out for both Exide and the City of Frisco," Maso said.

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