

Title: UNIONS WIN REPRESENTATION ELECTIONS FOR WORKERS AT GROOM LAKE
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A company holding a top-secret Defense Department contract cut deals Friday with three unions allowing elections to determine whether some employees want to be represented by the labor organizations.

The United Plant Guard Workers of America, the International Association of Firefighters and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 357 all either had signed or reached agreements Friday with EG&G Special Projects Inc. to hold elections for workers falling under their respective bargaining units, according to Jim Small, resident officer for the Las Vegas office of the National Labor Relations Board.

EG&G Special Projects Inc. is the contractor for the Air Force's operating location at Groom Lake, 125 miles northwest of Las Vegas in Lincoln County, former employees at the installation have said. The installation where radar-evading aircraft have been tested is the focus of federal lawsuits by former workers who claim they were exposed to toxic chemicals.

Discussions to reach stipulated agreements with the guard and firefighter unions had begun Thursday.

But an agreement with the electrical workers didn't appear to be on the horizon Thursday, judging from EG&G's posture during the hearing before NLRB Hearing Officer Michael Chavez.

EG&G attorney Kevin Efroymsen argued, in part, that the classified nature of EG&G's Defense Department contract precluded the disclosure of critical information in determining whether the bargaining unit is appropriate.

He called EG&G Special Projects Manager Bernard VanderWeele to testify about contract requirements spelling out security safeguards and requirements that employees must sign classified information nondisclosure agreements with the U.S. government.

Chavez queried VanderWeele about the boundaries of information employees could disclose. The security chief said electronic technicians could divulge things such as their job classification, wages, hours and benefits but could not discuss, for instance, aspects of their jobs with photo technicians.

Efroymsen also said the union's proposed unit is inappropriate because he contends it does not include all the employees who perform electronic work or who work in an integrated manner with people who conduct such work.

The classified nature of the EG&G contract, Efroymsen said, also meant he couldn't adequately prepare to address the issue because he is not authorized access to certain information.

After Thursday's hearing, Patricia Waldeck, the electrical workers attorney, said the burden is on the employer to show the unit would not be appropriate. She said VanderWeele's testimony indicated there is enough latitude in the worker agreements to disclose pertinent information related to the bargaining unit.

The hearing raised issues not normally heard in such union petition cases, Small said.

"This is unusual. To some extent, it's a matter of balancing security concerns with the rights of employees," he said.

EG&G Special Projects is believed by many to be the contractor for the installation, also known as Area 51, but Small said, "No one has said on the record it's Area 51."

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