

U.S. temporarily closes detention facility at Texas border

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Prisoners sit in one of the cages at a facility in McAllen, Texas. (Photo: AP)

McAllen, November 26 (RHC)-- The U.S. Border Patrol is temporarily closing a converted warehouse used to detain immigrants in South Texas for renovation. The McAllen facility garnered international attention when images emerged of children separated from their parents detained in chain-link cages inside.

The agency said in a statement Wednesday that the facility, known as the central processing center, will reopen in 2022 with a smaller capacity and “modern detention areas.” It will also have a recreation area for children. The renovation was first reported by The Washington Post.

Opened in 2014 during the administration of President Barack Obama, the facility was first used to hold immigrant children mostly from Central America who were crossing the U.S.-Mexico border alone. The Trump administration used the facility to hold parents and children it separated during its 2018 enforcement of a “zero tolerance” policy on border crossings.

Adults and children detained by the Border Patrol generally sleep on mats and are issued Mylar blankets. While the agency is generally supposed to transfer immigrants out of its custody within three days, people have at times been detained at the processing center and other facilities for days or weeks.

The Border Patrol said it is using funds from Congress to renovate the facility. If border crossings surge again, the agency said it “consistently re-evaluates future operational requirements to support the safe and legal processing” of immigrants.

The agency has several stations in South Texas that can hold immigrants. It has designated its station in Weslaco, Texas, to hold children. About 65 children, some unaccompanied and others with their parents, were detained at Weslaco last week, with advocates for immigrants warning that the detention conditions left them particularly exposed to COVID-19.

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