

# Insurer may net \$3M for hirings

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Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas could receive up to \$3.2 million from the Amarillo Economic Development Corp. if its new Amarillo call center hits certain hiring benchmarks by Dec. 1, but company officials aren't sure if they can meet the goal.

"Our current corporate plans remain to eventually grow employment further at this location - as soon as our business demands for additional growth are realized," said Blue Cross spokeswoman Margaret Jarvis.

The center opened in January 2008 with 120 employees and now has 176 workers.

"While we have not started losing accounts, existing accounts are getting smaller due to the economic downturn," Jarvis said.

The AEDC will pay Blue Cross \$175,000 if it employs 200 by Dec. 1, then \$10,000 for each job over 200 up to 500. The total incentive could hit \$3.2 million.

The company already has received \$2 million from the AEDC to buy the 11-acre site in the Point West Business Park.

The agreement requires Blue Cross to submit annual reports to the AEDC to evaluate employment levels. If in future years, the insurer shows a shortfall in employment levels, a formula exists to calculate repayments to the AEDC.

"We certainly hope that BCBS achieves an employment level that would cause AEDC to pay the full remaining incentive amount," said AEDC President and CEO Buzz David. "We want to encourage BCBS to continue to grow here in Amarillo and create as many jobs as possible."

David cautioned that the Blue Cross center is likely to stay in Amarillo because the company owns the 89,000-square-foot call center - rather than renting, which it does almost everywhere else in the state.

"The environment we're working in right now is not necessarily a growth environment," he said.

The Amarillo center is the insurer's seventh full-service center in Texas. Jarvis said business is going well for Blue Cross.

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