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BROWNFIELDS PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is a “brownfield”?

A brownfield is an abandoned or underused industrial or commercial facility where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination.

2. How do you determine if a site is a brownfield?

A site is classified as a brownfield by having an environmental assessment done on the property. The environmental assessment determines the extent of real or perceived contamination.



A “brownfield”

3. Where are brownfields located?

While traditionally seen as an urban issue, brownfields exist in suburban and rural areas as well. Consider the former gas station, an old rail yard or abandoned junk yard. Soil, water and air contamination can be caused by many different land use activities.

4. What can the property be reused for?

Brownfield properties are commonly redeveloped into housing, commercial, office, recreation, or governmental uses.

5. How does a community benefit from brownfield redevelopment?

The community benefits from brownfield redevelopment include but are not limited to:

- removing health and environmental concerns or perceptions*
- promoting smart growth (reusing of property instead of vacant land)*
- promoting economic growth (increasing tax base and creating jobs)*
- removing blighted property*
- building ties among residents, businesses, and all parties involved*
- building community awareness and empowering communities to address a problem that directly affects them*

6. How does the property owner benefit from brownfield redevelopment?

There are a number of benefits to property owners including, but not limited to:

- avoiding potential environmental enforcement actions*
- tax benefits for cleaning up and reusing the property*
- reducing the likelihood that contamination will migrate off the site or into groundwater and eliminating additional cleanup costs*
- creating good will within the community*
- making the property more valuable and marketable*
- legacy factor-not passing a burden on to heirs*

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7. Is a brownfield site the same as a Superfund site?

No. A Superfund site is land that is more severely contaminated and has high concentrations of hazardous waste or pollution therefore posing a real threat to human health and/or the environment. Brownfields pose less of a serious health or environmental threat, and generally prevent development and therefore stifle local economies.

8. How clean is clean?

The level of cleanup varies depending on several factors including, but not limited to, the intended reuse and location of the property.

9. What are the prime sources of contamination and/or typical land uses that make a property become a Brownfield site?

Some of the most common contaminants identified at Brownfield sites are from fuels such as oil, gasoline, diesel and kerosene from underground storage tanks, floor drains, outside storage of barrels and machinery, and cleaning solvents. Former land uses at Brownfield sites can be any use that uses fuels (including heating) and cleaning solvents. The more common uses include former service stations, dry cleaners, mill buildings, warehouses, parking lots, abandoned railroads and landfills.

10. Aside for assessment funding, what are some other governmental programs that are available to facilitate brownfield redevelopment?

Several programs have been created to aid property owners in the clean up and redevelopment of Brownfield sites. Some of the assistance includes;

- federal, state and local tax incentives*
- grants and low interest loans*
- technical assistance*
- liability protection*
- assistance with local approvals*



Boring holes to test for ground contamination

11. Does participating in a Brownfields Program increase real or potential liability for existing environmental contamination?

As a participant in the SWRPC Brownfields Program, prospective new purchasers, secured creditors or mortgage holders, municipalities and some current property owners are eligible to participate in state and federal "Covenant Not to Sue" programs. The Covenant Not to Sue programs are designed to provide incentives in the form of liability protections for the investigation, cleanup and redevelopment of contaminated properties by persons who did not cause or contribute to the contamination. These programs were instituted in order to encourage redevelopment of underutilized properties.