



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BROWNFIELDS

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Q: What is a brownfield?

A: A brownfield is defined as: "A piece of industrial or commercial property that is abandoned or underused and often environmentally contaminated, especially one considered as a potential site for redevelopment."^{*}

For purposes of obtaining financial assistance from the federal government, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a definition of "brownfield" as "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contamination."^{**} EPA goes on to identify sites that are excluded from this definition, to ensure that brownfield assistance goes only to those sites for which it is intended.

Although Alaska does not have its own definition for the term "brownfield," the EPA definition is generally accepted by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC): brownfields are abandoned, unused, or underused properties that are hindered from desired reuse or redevelopment by real or perceived environmental contamination. A brownfield can be anything from a 200-acre industrial property, to an old lumber mill, to a small abandoned corner gas station.

Q: Why is brownfield reuse and redevelopment important, and how can it help my community?

A: Brownfield redevelopment is important in many ways: to preserve open space that would otherwise be gobbled up by urban sprawl; to reuse valuable existing infrastructure in city-planning projects; to revitalize stressed and depressed neighborhoods; to increase economic growth, employment opportunities, property values, and tax revenue; and to protect public health and the environment by reducing environmental threats.

It is important to remember that brownfields are not only an urban problem, and reuse doesn't have to mean new construction projects. Brownfields do exist in rural Alaska, and often take up valuable space within the community and are harmful to subsistence resources and other traditional pursuits. In any community, we must do what we can to reuse rather than waste valuable infrastructure and space. The recycling of brownfields is important both environmentally and economically.

Q: What is DEC's involvement in brownfields in Alaska?

A: DEC strongly supports and promotes the reuse of brownfields through its *Reuse and Redevelopment Initiative*. DEC understands the importance of brownfield revitalization as a means to correct environmental problems. The Contaminated Sites Program works to ensure that its regulations can accommodate brownfield projects whenever possible. DEC's brownfield program assists Alaskans by providing assessment services and identifying funding opportunities for assessment, cleanup, and training. Brownfield staff

^{*} Definition according to the American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.

^{**} Public Law 107-118 (H.R. 2869), the "Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act," signed into law on January 11, 2002.

members also educate the public about brownfields, and are working to continually develop Alaska's unique brownfields programs.

Q: Who do I go to with questions about brownfields?

A: We invite you to contact us with any questions or concerns about brownfields. Both John Carnahan (451-2166) and Sonja Benson (451-2156) are available to help answer your questions about contaminated sites and potential brownfields, workshops and training, and funding opportunities. Please consider us your first stop for information.

Q: What brownfield concerns are particular to Alaska?

A: Alaskan urban areas have many of the same brownfield concerns as large urban centers in the rest of the country: former industrial sites, petroleum and chemical storage areas, abandoned commercial businesses, old gas stations, railroad yards, and many others. However, Alaskan rural communities have brownfields that are unique to their remote locations. Some of these sites include: old canneries and fish processing facilities; old fuel-storage tank farms; abandoned, inactive dump sites; logging camps; old civilian federal facilities such as schools and hospitals; and formerly used defense sites. Very often these brownfields may directly affect a subsistence resource.

Q: If I assess a brownfield property, do I become liable for the contamination that is found?

A: Liability for contamination on a property is defined in Alaska Statute (AS) 46.03.822, which outlines those who are liable for the release of a hazardous substance. The general liability categories include: (1) those with an ownership interest in the property; (2) those in control of the substance at the time of the release; or (3) those who arrange for disposal or transport of the substance. If you are not the owner of the property on which an assessment is completed, and you did not cause or contribute to the problem, conducting a non-invasive assessment (such as a historical search or walk-through) would not cause you to be considered liable. If your investigation is more invasive, and involves drilling or excavation, this increases the chance that your actions could cause a release, or cause an existing problem to become worse. If this type of action were to occur, this *could* invoke your liability under AS 46.03.822.

Q: What is a "Phase I" Environmental Site Assessment?

A: A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) is an initial assessment that is usually associated with a property transfer. A Phase I involves a review of ownership records and historical uses of the property, a site visit, and interviews, in order to identify any *recognized environmental conditions* that could have resulted in potential releases of hazardous substances to the environment. Many lending institutions require these Phase I ESAs to help ensure that they are not financing a contaminated site for which they may be held liable. The industry-accepted procedure for a Phase I ESA is published by ASTM International, and is available at a charge through their website.

Q: What is a "Phase II" Environmental Site Assessment?

A: A Phase II is a second-stage ESA done to confirm the presence or absence of recognized environmental conditions that may have been identified during the Phase I. The Phase II generally includes the collection and analysis of soil, sediment, groundwater, or surface water samples. The Phase II report often makes recommendations for further assessment or cleanup.

For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/csp/brownfields.htm>