

Frequently Asked Questions

What are brownfields?

A brownfield is a property that has been abandoned or is underused because of environmental contamination or the fear of such contamination.

What is the purpose of this Brownfield Assessment grant project?

The purpose of this grant is to assess the level and nature of environmental contamination at selected brownfield sites and conduct planning for the cleanup and reuse of the properties. By assessing contaminated properties in Wilmington, the City is quantifying the risks involved in redeveloping the properties to encourage property owners and developers to cleanup the sites and put them back into productive use.

What is the EPA's involvement?

The Brownfield Assessment Project is NOT a regulatory program. These projects are a mechanism/tool to promote economic development. EPA involvement is typically limited to review of work plans and general program oversight.

How does a community benefit from brownfield redevelopment?

Brownfield redevelopment can help a community in many ways. Many brownfield sites are in unattractive, economically depressed parts of a neighborhood. Cleanup and redevelopment of the sites can encourage higher property values and create jobs, as well as positively impact the local economy by creating a safer, healthier urban space to house businesses and residences.

What does the program offer property owners?

Participation in the Wilmington Brownfield Program by the private sector is voluntary. The program helps move properties towards redevelopment by conducting Phase I and Phase II environmental site assessments and identifying/removing the environmental risk/uncertainty associated with the property. With the funds from the EPA, the City will be able to pay for environmental site assessment activities on properties where the current owner or prospective purchaser is unwilling and/or unable. Program participation is particularly helpful where a property is perceived to have an environmental problem, although one may not actually exist. Participation in the program is not mandatory; that is, if the City identifies your property as a potential Brownfield site you do NOT have to participate. In addition, not all properties are eligible for participation under the program, and funding is limited for assessing these properties.

What is a Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessment?

The primary goal for a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment activity is to make an "appropriate inquiry into previous ownership and use of the property consistent with good commercial or customary practice." A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment is a vital part of commercial and industrial property transactions where potential liability is a concern and is most often required by lenders and attorneys prior to finalizing a real estate transaction. Phase I Environmental Site Assessments are conducted according to guidelines established in the American Society for Testing & Materials (ASTM) Standard Practice for Environmental Site Assessment (E 1527) and EPA's All Appropriate Inquiries Rule. There are four primary components to the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment: Records Review, Site Reconnaissance, Interviews, and Report Preparation. The Phase I Environmental Site Assessment report will include a statement as to evidence of recognized environmental conditions. Phase I Environmental Site Assessments do not include sampling or chemical

analysis of soil, groundwater or other media. Where concerns are identified, recommendations for Phase II Environmental Site Assessment activity are generally included in the report.

Phase II Environmental Site Assessments include site-specific sampling and chemical analyses to characterize the occurrence, distribution, nature and extent of hazardous compounds in soil and groundwater at a property. Phase II Environmental Site Assessments generally provide the necessary information needed to determine if cleanup activities are warranted on the property.

If I am a property owner and I participate what happens if environmental contamination is found?

If your property has environmental contamination, being selected by the Brownfield project provides you one of the best possible working scenarios with the EPA. If environmental contamination is found, the project may assist with development of cleanup and redevelopment plans. The EPA Brownfields Assessment Program is NOT a regulatory program. In most cases those parties who are deemed responsible for cleanup activities and are voluntarily participating in the EPA Brownfield Program are not required to complete the cleanup activities as part of the program. In rare cases, where contamination is deemed to be an imminent threat to human health and the environment, then EPA may require immediate action to address the contamination.

Who will pay for the cleanup if contamination is found?

The existing Brownfields project cannot pay for cleanup; the funds can only be used for environmental site assessments and cleanup/redevelopment planning. EPA offers separate cleanup grants to assist with cleanup activities. These cleanup grants are available only to local governments and non-profit organizations. However, EPA does offer low interest loans to private property owners for the cleanup of contamination. Unless the property is owned by a local government or non-profit organization, the private sector (property owner) typically takes the lead and is responsible for most environmental cleanup projects. The program does not require a potential seller or buyer to commit to performing prohibitively expensive cleanup.

How can I get involved?

The City of Wilmington is actively seeking the involvement of community partners and citizens in the implementation of the EPA Brownfields Assessment Project. There are several ways to get involved with this initiative: 1) Identify Sites - Tell the City of any brownfield sites in the area you know about; 2) Help Prioritize Sites - Let the City know what brownfield sites you feel are most important for the community to redevelop; 3) Assist in Planning - Share your vision for what should happen at the high-priority sites and share information on past uses of properties with planners and environmental consultants; and 4) Stay Informed - Keep up to date on project activities. These can be accomplished by visiting the project web site and attending scheduled community meetings.