

Cleaning Up Oregon's Brownfields

What is a brownfield?

A brownfield is a vacant or underutilized commercial or industrial property where environmental, economic and social obstacles hinder use and redevelopment.

Why should Oregon clean up its brownfields?

- Contaminated sites may pose health and safety risks to the surrounding community and degrade the quality of Oregon's natural resources
- Redeveloping brownfields helps manage growth by:
 1. Making use of the existing infrastructure
 2. Discouraging development of uncontaminated properties
 3. Preserving farmland and pristine rural areas
- Reused industrial sites enhance the community by providing jobs and increasing the tax base
- Neighboring properties are also affected by these unsightly locations and by the stigma of contamination, which often leads to declining real estate values

What are the barriers to redeveloping brownfields?

- Fear that the cost to investigate, control pollution or clean up contamination will be high relative to the property's potential value
- Lack of information about the existence or extent of contamination
- Concern about liability for past contamination discourages potential purchasers
- Uncertainty about regulatory processes, time-frames and the level of cleanup required
- Difficulty of obtaining financing for sites with unquantified risk

How does DEQ help brownfield redevelopment?

Ensures that cleanups protect human health and the environment:

- Performs site assessments to determine the extent of contamination

- Offers an effective Voluntary Cleanup Program which provides oversight of cleanup efforts outside of the enforcement mode
- Cleans up high priority "orphan" sites when owners can't afford to or are not known

Identifies and removes redevelopment barriers:

- Provides liability relief to buyers through Prospective Purchaser Agreements
- Supports flexible approaches to cleanup, from "cookbook" standards and generic remedies to site-specific risk-based decisions
- Performs cleanup oversight that is responsive to the time lines and other requirements of individual development projects
- Oregon cleanup law provides liability protection for lenders in most cases

Forms partnerships to facilitate the reuse of brownfield properties:

- Provides technical assistance to local governments
- Coordinates with community groups, businesses and government agencies working on cleanup projects
- Works with other parties to form redevelopment financing strategies

DEQ's Brownfield Redevelopment Projects

DEQ has been involved in a wide variety of brownfield projects, ranging from small rural industrial sites to a community-based revitalization of a multi-property area. Some projects turn unused properties into new businesses, while others provide urban greenspaces. The Astoria Millsite Project is a good illustration.

Focus: Astoria Millsite Project

When operations ceased at this former plywood mill in 1991, the owners planned to address the contamination through DEQ's Voluntary Cleanup program. Further investigation revealed more severe environmental problems and the costs eventually exceeded the owner's ability to pay for cleanup. Having determined that the site



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

Environmental
Cleanup Division
811 SW 6th Avenue
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 229-5913
(800) 452-4011
Fax: (503) 229-5830
www.deq.state.or.us

was a high environmental priority, DEQ used its orphan site funds to mitigate the worst threats.

The City of Astoria began working with DEQ early in the restoration of this 20-acre site located in a developed area near the Columbia River. The City purchased the property in January, 1999 and has sold it to a developer for mixed residential and commercial development. As a part of the purchase agreement, the City reimbursed the State for a substantial portion of the cleanup costs, which will, in turn, provide DEQ funds to clean up additional sites.



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