



# Removing the Stigma of Contamination and Repairing Blighted Areas

## No Cleanup Required

**T**hroughout the country, brownfields properties are plagued with the stigma of environmental contamination. Many of these properties are located in low-income urban areas with existing infrastructure, a desperate need for economic stimulation, and community support for their redevelopment. However, they remain abandoned or idle because of perceived contamination left over from centuries of manufacturing and industry that became obsolete or moved elsewhere. Often, the communities surrounding these brownfields suffer from high unemployment and poorly performing local economies. Returning these properties to productive use is a key goal of EPA's Brownfields Assessment Pilot program. Approximately one-third of brownfields assessed to date under the Pilot program are found to have no significant contamination or low enough levels that no cleanup is required. Once the stigma of contamination is removed, these sites typically become irresistible to purchasers and developers, who quickly return them to use. Examples of these transformations follow below.

Complementing the city's goal of increasing middle-income housing, the Galveston, Texas Assessment Pilot is facilitating redevelopment of the 73rd and N ½ property into single-family middle-income homes, a scarce commodity on this Gulf of Mexico island with little available land for redevelopment. While the Galveston Housing Finance Corporation (GHFC) was interested in purchasing and redeveloping the 6.58-acre site, it had been concerned about environmental contamination due to past light agricultural use and an unknown fill material used to raise the site to the level of the flood plain (an expensive investment that enhanced the site's attractiveness). To facilitate purchase and redevelopment of the site, the Galveston Pilot conducted an assessment that revealed no cleanup was necessary. GHFC subsequently purchased the property and began construction of Barton Square, a residential community of 40 homes with a maximum selling price of \$125,000, which will be completed by July 2003. Currently, construction of the roads and infrastructure is complete, several homes have been sold and are occupied, several houses are nearing

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*A new home built on a former brownfield in the Twin Cities area, Minnesota.*

## JUST THE FACTS:

- Following assessments by the Tulsa, Oklahoma Brownfields Assessment Pilot and the property owner's participation in the state Voluntary Cleanup Program, the former Flint Steel Building was determined to require no cleanup prior to redevelopment.
- The Englewood, Colorado Brownfields Assessment Pilot oversaw assessments on a 9-acre former steel manufacturing site, paid for by a \$17,500 line of credit through the city's Revolving Loan Fund; the assessments determined that no cleanup was necessary.
- A former dry cleaning property in New Britain, Connecticut is being redeveloped into a portion of an 8.5-acre urban park. Once it was determined that no cleanup was necessary, the state transferred ownership of the property to the city.

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completion, and most of the lots have been sold. Jan Coggeshall, chairwoman of GHFC, stated that first-time homebuyers, such as police officers and teachers that work on the island, are the target residents of this community. "[Barton Square] will be the first new subdivision built on the island in a long time," says Coggeshall. "It also will put a significant amount on the tax rolls."

In partnership with the Minnesota Environmental Initiative (MEI) and Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council Brownfields Assessment Pilot conducted assessments of several targeted sites. Once these assessments were completed, Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity purchased and began redevelopment on two sites requiring no cleanup.

Using approximately \$415,000 in funding and in-kind services from Habitat of Humanity and its partners, three homes were built during the Spring and Summer of 2001 and another in Fall 2001. The Twin Cities Metropolitan Council Pilot and

its partners hope to create a model that will allow other affordable housing builders to expand their capabilities and options. Stephen Seidel, executive director of Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, stated that "As we at Twin Cities Habitat strive to meet the ever-increasing need for affordable housing in our community, it is essential that we have the capacity to consider every location that has the possibility of providing housing that is affordable to low- to moderate-income people. Thanks to this collaboration [with the Brownfields Pilot and MEI], generously supported by the Environmental Protection Agency, we are able to do just that." On February 13, 2002, EPA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Habitat for Humanity International to work in partnership to build energy-efficient homes on former brownfields throughout the country.



*A site in Galveston, Texas that was determined to require no cleanup.*

Following assessments by the Tulsa, Oklahoma Brownfields Assessment Pilot and the property owner's participation in the state Voluntary Cleanup Program, the former Flint Steel Building site received a Certificate of No Further Action (NFA) from the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality Brownfields Program once it was determined that no cleanup of the site was required. The NFA releases the owner and any investors in the site from state and EPA liability. The former steel manufacturing site, owned by Flintco Companies, will be redeveloped into a \$1.4 million warehouse, and an industrial build-to-suit building for manufacturing or warehouse companies looking for space. As stated by Tom Maxwell, president of Flintco Companies, "This is a win-win for Tulsa. We have a strong commitment to Tulsa, and we feel the redevelopment of this site will help to create jobs and attract capital investments." Another Pilot-targeted site determined to require no cleanup is being redeveloped into a new 80,000-square-foot City of Tulsa Housing Authority warehouse and job training center.



*A brownfield in Tulsa, Oklahoma*

The Englewood, Colorado Brownfields Assessment Pilot oversaw assessments on a 9-acre former steel manufacturing site, paid for by a \$17,500 line of credit through the city's Revolving Loan Fund; the assessments determined that no cleanup was necessary.

This site was purchased for \$1.25 million by Keogh & Company, a national printing company that

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expanded onto the site from an adjacent facility. After conducting minimal rehabilitation of the existing 60,000-square-foot building, the printing company now produces large-scale posters and banners at the property. This redevelopment allowed for the creation of 25 new jobs and the retention of 90 existing jobs, as the company may have had to move its operation elsewhere had expansion been unavailable. Although this site was not selected based solely on its no cleanup determination, it certainly made this project more lucrative and timely.

As part of a community-wide revitalization project, a former dry cleaning property in New Britain, Connecticut, is being redeveloped into a portion of an 8.5-acre urban park that will include a community center and residential units. The New Britain Brownfields Assessment Pilot conducted assessments that determined that no cleanup was necessary, which led to the City of New Britain accepting the transfer of ownership of the property from the State of Connecticut. Located in one of the city's most poverty-stricken and crime-ridden neighborhoods, the community center will include a Head Start Program for kids and a computer lab, while the residential area will include up to eight moderate-income homes. At the opposite end of the planned urban park, another Pilot-targeted site is being redeveloped into an urban organic farm in which greenhouses are being constructed on uncontaminated portions of the site, as well as on adjacent property. The Pilot has helped to leverage more than \$1.3 million in redevelopment funding for this project from various sources that include the city, state, and private companies. Construction of the urban park will be completed in 2003.

These are just a few examples of successful redevelopment at brownfields sites across the country that had formerly lain idle for too long. After the fear of environmental contamination is laid to rest with environmental assessments, developers, cities, and citizens alike can reap the financial rewards of reusing lands once thought to be untouchable.

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