Brownfields

Brownfields are abandoned, idled or underused industrial and commercial sites where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination that can add cost, time or uncertainty to a redevelopment project.

Brownfields pose health and safety risks to the surrounding communities. Because of the real or perceived threat of contamination, these properties are more expensive to develop than are greenfields, and hence remain a blight to inner cities while sprawl consumes farmlands and pristine lands outside of cities.

Problem with Brownfields

Every major city and most all towns suffer from the environmental blight, social impact, and financial drain of brownfields in their midst. Around 130,000-450,000 contaminated commercial and industrial sites blight the United States. These polluted sites cause large portions of major cities to be overrun with urban blight. Because of the potential threat of environmental liability, these site are difficult and costly to redevelop. For example, a survey of Toledo, Ohio revealed that 62 percent of the area's commercial and industrial real estate transactions are encumbered by environmental issues.

Brownfields are often ugly, with run down buildings and potential safety hazards. Not only are brownfields an environmental problem in an of themselves, but the high risks and costs of developing these areas forces developers to create urban sprawl by buying "virgin land" or "greenfields" (farms, wetlands, previously "unimproved" land) on which to build.

The presence of brownfields in a community diminishes the value of the community, property values, peace of mind when kids go to play in brownfields. People living next to a brownfield often want move from the contaminated site, but because of the economic risk of the brownfield, the value of their land depreciates, trapping these unfortunate residents.

In many cities, brownfields are the major obstacles to urban redevelopment. Cleaning up US brownfields may cost $650 billion dollars, roughly the equivalent of $2,100 for every child, woman and man in the US. This price does not even include the indirect costs of reduced economic development. For example, it is estimated that cities lose tax dollars totaling around $120 -380 million due to lost income from idle brownfield sites.

Government Support

Because of the magnitude of the brownfields problem, state and federal governments are working together with communities and all stakeholders to address this problem.
The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established its Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative to empower states, communities, and other stakeholders involved in economic revitalization to work together to accomplish the redevelopment of such sites.

Brownfields redevelopment is so important that the United States Senate has passed a brownfields bill, S350. As of May, 2001, this bill, entitled the 'Brownfields Revitalization and Environmental Restoration Act of 2001', is being considered by the house.

Many states and local jurisdictions also help business and communities adopt environmental cleanup programs to the special needs of Brownfields sites.

---

Links

- **Brownfields** - US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) website that offers definitions, publications, programs, contacts, laws and regulations.
- **Brownfields** - US Housing and Urban Development (HUD) site includes a nice FAQ page, conferences, links to other web sites and a chat room.
- **Brownfields Nonprofit Network** - A network of nonprofit organizations helping to promote the redevelopment of Brownfield properties throughout the United States.
- **Brownfields Center** - Brownfields Center (TBC) is a joint venture of Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh founded on the recognized need to integrate multiple disciplines to realize potential benefits from revitalizing idle industrial sites.
- **Portland Brownfields Initiative** - A site loaded with leads to lots of information on brownfields from one of America's leading environmental urban places. Includes a Brownfields for Global Learners a site that gives a good background on brownfields.
- **Brownfields Resource Guide - Washington** - state's effort with links to other useful sites.
- **Great Lakes Regional Online Brownfields Information Network (ROBIN)** - ROBIN is an Internet clearinghouse for information about brownfields cleanup and redevelopment throughout the binational Great Lakes region.
- **Integrated Approach for Brownfield Redevelopment** - thorough analysis of brownfield issues - part of the Smartgrowth program with EPA.
- **Institute for Responsible Management** - This group charts and facilitates the Brownfields transformation. The links from this page are particularly strong.
- **Recycling America's Land** - A good web site from the U.S. Conference of Mayors.