

Redeveloping Rochester: Brownfields and Public Health

What is a brownfield?

Brownfields are typically commercial or industrial properties that are more difficult to buy, sell and redevelop because of the costs and legal concerns associated with real or perceived environmental contamination. Examples of brownfields include former manufacturing facilities, gas stations, dumps, and businesses such as printers or dry cleaners.

Do all brownfield sites require environmental cleanup?

No – not all brownfields are actually contaminated. If, through an investigation, contamination is confirmed, the level of contamination and potential reuse of the brownfield properties determine the cleanup plan.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation have strict rules about investigation and cleanup of contaminated sites. They also require public notification and opportunities for public comment.

How could contamination at brownfields affect people's health?

Contamination can only affect people's health if **both**:

1. The level of contamination is high enough to be hazardous to human health, **and**
2. There is a way that people might come into contact with (be exposed to) the contamination.

If these two conditions are not both occurring, there is no chance that people's health would be affected. If redevelopment or reuse of the site is proposed, Local, State and sometimes federal agencies work together to investigate the contamination and develop a plan for cleanup. Protecting public health is the main goal of the plan. The plan typically requires monitoring of chemicals in the air, soil, and water around the site to make sure neighbors are protected during cleanup.

Why is redevelopment of a brownfield healthier for my neighborhood?

Brownfield cleanup and redevelopment by private owners or governments not only improves vacant and ugly properties, but it also creates sites for possible new housing, businesses, recreation spaces, and services that improve a neighborhood. By eliminating vacancy and blight, redevelopment can improve safety and strengthen the sense of community within neighborhoods.

How can I help?

Community members can help by participating in planning for brownfield cleanup and redevelopment, and by voicing ideas and concerns throughout the process. Long-term residents can often offer valuable historic information about brownfield sites.

It is important for community members to be part of the whole redevelopment process. This includes:

- **Learn:** Ask questions and attend public meetings.
- **Give input:** Inform decision makers about what is right for your neighborhood.
- **Report:** During cleanup and construction, contact the project manager to report any problems or concerns.

Whom should I contact if I have questions about a brownfield?

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