

SAFETY AND SECURITY

By Terri Smith, Environmental Liability Management

Taking a proactive approach to identifying brownfield sites and redevelopment

Many communities across New Jersey and Pennsylvania are reclaiming abandoned, vacant former industrial and commercial properties that have become eyesores and threaten the safety of the citizens who live nearby. Often times these properties have buildings that have fallen into disrepair and can be considered a safety hazard to those who enter them. Moreover, these abandoned and overgrown properties provide an environment that can promote drug use, unintentional housing for vagrants and other safety concerns for community residents. These sites can impact a community's quality of life and threaten its citizens. Camden, New Jersey and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania are two such communities where blocks of abandoned properties were recently razed to provide housing and other redevelopment opportunities for its citizens. Many other communities across the country are also taking a proactive approach to the redevelopment of brownfield properties.

Deteriorating properties that provide a haven for crimi-



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nal behavior can impact a community's sense of security as well as have a profound negative impact on the quality of life. They often times become the place of illegal dumping, a fire hazard and as previously stated a place for vagrants and/or drug abuse. The redevelopment of these properties can allow a community to reinvent itself by developing strategies to promote its uniqueness and thereby attracting new investment into the area.

In times of ever developing budget concerns communities around the country are often

faced with developing priorities for addressing the pressing concerns facing the town.

However, in regards to the redevelopment of formerly utilized industrial and commercial properties that may or may not be contaminated, I have often heard Mayors' ask the following question, "How much will it cost if we do nothing?"

Brownfield sites can drain the energy and life from a once vibrant community due to the existence or perception of contamination. Richard Moe of the National Historic Trust has stated that "communities can be shaped by choice, or they can be shaped by chance. We can keep on accepting the kind of communities we get, or we can start creating the kind of communities we want". This statement reflects the need to **empower** communities to participate proactively in the redevelopment of these properties.

By taking a proactive approach to identifying brownfield sites and developing a strategy to take these eyesores and move them into redevelopment or reuse citizens can provide a more vibrant and safer environment

in which to live, work and play. Many experienced developers look at brownfield properties as opportunities to increase the vitality of the community in which they want to conduct business. Through redevelopment efforts you eliminate the safety concerns surrounding these sites and create an area for a business to thrive and provide the services that the community requires.

The quality of life issue is critical to the residents of a community as well as the developer who is looking to invest his money in the redevelopment of a contaminated brownfield site. There are many developers who are actively promoting reinvestment into established communities where existing infrastructure can lead to a less costly redevelopment effort.

By enticing developers to invest in these properties, communities are recognizing the economic and long term benefits in their efforts for growth. This approach fosters the "smart growth" efforts being undertaken in New Jersey and Pennsylvania as well as other states across the country.

The National Association of

Local Government Environmental Professionals (NALGEP) and the Smart Growth Leadership Institute in the recent publication "Smart Growth is Smart Business," state that "businesses increasingly recognize that quality of life is a key economic asset and they seek locations in "livable communities" where people want to live". In addition, they identify that in today's global marketplace, where money and people are extremely mobile, the quality of life is especially important.

Smart Growth principals assist communities in their efforts to protect the vital green space that remains to enhance the quality of life in the area. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has determined that for every acre of brownfields that are reclaimed it saves an estimated 4.5 acres of green space and, in turn every green space saved or created on average doubled the value of the surrounding area.

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