

October 13, 2010

Notes from Brownfields Job Training Professional Learning Community (PLC) Session #30

Session leader: Mike Senew

Topic: Working with the Community – Labor Market Assessments

NOTES FROM SESSION 30

This session we discussed a PLC member's question – "I have several abandoned industrial sites and several neighborhoods with boarded up houses. How do I determine if they are Brownfields sites? Does the answer result from a Phase I and/or Phase II assessment? Can a property like an abandoned meat packing plant or chemical plant be deemed a Brownfields by definition and based on more than thirty years of manufacturing operations using various chemicals in the 50s, 60s, and 70s?"

~Thanks to Al Dyson, Dyson Engineering & Technical Services, 901.482.3397 cell

~Response thanks to Tim Binkley, Earth Movements, Winston-Salem, NC. Tim can be reach at tpbinkley@earthlink.net or by phone at 336.724.9350. Tim has assisted in the planning, grant development, and project management for Brownfields projects, grant proposals, and job training programs. Tim administered a successful EPA Brownfields Job Development and Training Program in Winston-Salem for several years.

Per the question this week, as a general overview:

Brownfields, in the larger sense, are simply properties that have been abandoned or underutilized as a result of real or perceived contamination. Before any assessment is done, it matters very little whether or not the contamination is real. The perception alone is often enough to scare away prospective redevelopers.

In the regulatory sense, however, potential Brownfields sites have to meet several important criteria:

1. The parties that stand to benefit from the sale/redevelopment cannot have contributed to the contamination. The ideal BF site is one in which no Responsible Party (RP) can be found, and the property is held by owners that had nothing to do with the contamination. They could be estate heirs, municipalities that got property through condemnation or contribution, etc.
2. The project must have public benefit. That is, even though a developer will reap income from the redevelopment, the project must be able to demonstrate that it will, in fact, provide some benefit like jobs, increased tax revenue, improved safety conditions, etc.
3. The projects are transparent and involve the community through public meetings and education.
4. The sites must not be already regulated under other programs. For example, a wood treating facility that is still in operation and working through a RCRA program to address its environmental issues cannot become a BF, even though it meets the requirement of having known contamination. Superfund sites may or may not qualify, depending on: a) Whether the site is already being addressed through the voluntary cleanup portion of Superfund; b) Whether or not there is a known RP who is avoiding compliance; c) Risk. Those sites that are on the Sites Priority List as extreme risks typically cannot be considered because the risk poses an imminent threat to human health and the environment.

5. The site must not be primarily contaminated by releases (leaks) from underground storage tanks (USTs). Many states have UST programs that would supersede Brownfields. If, however, a site contains waste that includes primarily listed hazardous materials such as tetrachloroethylene, carbon tetrachloride, etc. co-mingled with UST releases, the site has a chance to qualify. Surface spills of petroleum products, as opposed to UST releases, might potentially qualify depending on the circumstances because they are covered by the Oil Spill Act, and not UST regulations. However, it is often less costly in terms of time to remediate surface spills that don't reach groundwater through means other than Brownfields because the cost of petroleum waste is substantially less than that of hazardous materials, and the timeframe may be shorter than through Brownfields. In NC, for example, it costs around \$5000 just to apply for Brownfields status, and it might take 1 to 1.5 years to get the application reviewed and work through assessment issues. Many redevelopers are not willing to wait an unknown period of time to get an answer. To get an application fast-tracked, the fee is \$30,000 in NC, so it would not make sense to go this route if cleanup will cost less than that.
6. Dry cleaning sites that are contaminated with the chemicals that were used in the past (up until maybe 5-10 years ago) are typically good possibilities, but some states have regulatory programs to address dry cleaning facilities. NC is among them.

Ultimately, it makes the most sense to speak directly with a Brownfields regulator to discuss property on a site-by-site basis. Brownfields regulations, although national in scope, are handled differently in different states.

An excellent resource is the following publication: *Brownfields: a comprehensive guide to redeveloping contaminated property*, by Todd S. Davis.

It should be noted that Brownfields is a term that applies to a variety of properties that are perceived to be contaminated. Brownfields job training graduates may work at a variety of sites including voluntary cleanups and sites not formally Brownfields but often referred to as Brownfields.

Additional sites and projects may include:

- Solid waste sites
- Deconstruction sites
- Construction sites
- Renovation & repair projects
- Urban agriculture projects
- Water projects
- Highway projects
- Spills and leaks
- Underground contamination
- Energy & conservation projects

TOPIC THIS WEEK – Working with the Community / Labor Market Assessments

Community involvement and working with employers go “hand-in-hand” with labor market assessments, recruitment, and placement of program participants.

1. Labor market assessments may include a scan or survey of potential employers but should not stop there.

2. Labor market assessments should include identification of industry groups and employers associated with activities listed above. These organizations engage in the following activities:
 - a. may cause environmental degradation
 - b. clean up or remediate environmental degradation
 - c. help prevent or reduce environmental degradation
 - d. assess and monitor environmental degradation
 - e. regulate environmental degradation
3. Employers may not be located in or adjacent to the Brownfields community but are active in the community. This is especially true with big demolition, construction, and remediation projects.
4. Employer relationships should be made early during the program planning process, during the assessment process. Relationships with employers should include key contacts that will become familiar with the job training program.
5. Contacting HR staff is fine but not a substitute for getting to know technical staff. The best labor market assessments include trips to job sites and “face-to-face” discussions with technical and management personnel.

Direct contact with potential employers accomplishes several job development objectives:

1. Face-to-face contact provides the most comprehensive feedback regarding labor demands and work schedules associated with hiring new employees.
2. Labor market assessments blend with employer recruitment when program participants are ready to graduate. A comprehensive labor market assessment will insure potential employers are “on board”.
3. A good labor market assessment will guide curriculum and program development. Direct contact with employers assists in determining graduation dates, training cycles, company expectations, and restrictions.
4. Labor market assessments (on a face-to-face basis) can assist in the development of an advisory board.
5. Individuals contacted during labor market assessments may become partners, supporters, or contributors to the job training program.

The “take away” message during this session is that surveys are fine and should be documented, but truly effective labor market assessments include face-to-face interaction with potential employers. Discussions and contact information should be documented and included as part of a comprehensive proposal relating to your labor market assessment.

A more detailed discussion of labor market assessments and Brownfields job training funding can be found at www.brownfields-toolbox.org.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC Session: October 27, 2010
 2:00pm EDT

Feel free to invite a guest! Send your contact information to Mike Senew at msenew@aol.com.