

## Brownfields in Oregon



State of Oregon  
Department of  
Environmental  
Quality

**Operations Division  
Cleanup and  
Emergency Response  
Section**

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### What is a brownfield?

A brownfield is a vacant or underused property where actual or perceived environmental contamination complicates its expansion or redevelopment.

### Why care about brownfields?

Contaminated property may pose health and safety risks to the surrounding community. Even the mere *perception* of site contamination can affect the neighborhood by lowering property values.

On the other hand, cleaning up and redeveloping brownfields helps communities remove blight and provides needed services, such as industrial or commercial development, housing, or open space for playing fields and parks. Redeveloping land that is already urbanized also helps reduce sprawl.

### Brownfields redevelopment barriers?

A prospective purchaser may fear that the cost of investigating and cleaning up a property will be too high to make it a profitable investment. And until the property is investigated, its cleanup cost is unknown. While there may turn out to be no contamination, lenders can be reluctant to finance sites with unknown risk.

In addition, municipalities may fear liability from taking on brownfields. There may be community pressure to take action, but a lack of local expertise and funding frequently results in inaction.

### How can DEQ help with brownfields?

DEQ can help remove environmental barriers to redevelopment by providing assistance in investigating and cleaning up potentially contaminated sites. A number of programs and services are available through DEQ's [Cleanup Program](#).

DEQ's Brownfields staff can conduct Site-Specific Assessments to determine whether a property is contaminated and what additional actions may be needed to obtain a DEQ no further action determination.

Brownfields can also be investigated by municipalities or private parties under the supervision of DEQ's [Voluntary Cleanup Program](#). Generally, the parties hire an environmental cleanup contractor for investigative and cleanup work. DEQ reviews the work for consistency with state cleanup law. Alternatively, a party may choose to seek DEQ approval through the [Independent Cleanup Pathway](#) after an investigation or cleanup has been completed at qualified sites.

For many parties who want to purchase a brownfield property, DEQ offers the option of negotiating a [Prospective Purchaser Agreement](#) or PPA. Under a PPA, a prospective buyer of contaminated property agrees, before acquiring the property, to contribute a certain amount of money or effort towards cleaning it up. In return, DEQ agrees to limit the prospective purchaser's future liability, even upon discovery of new contamination after property purchase.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, DEQ works with communities, organizations, and other government agencies to facilitate brownfield redevelopment. For example, DEQ works with [Oregon's Business Development Department](#) to find funding for brownfield investigations and cleanups. DEQ also helps local governments and nonprofits apply for grants from the U.S. EPA and other sources.

### For more information

Contact Gil Wistar, DEQ's Brownfields Coordinator, at 503-229-5512, or toll free in Oregon 800-452-4011. You can find additional information on DEQ's [brownfields web page](#).

The Oregon Business Development Department, 503-986-0191 can also provide assistance in brownfields planning and finance.

### Alternative formats

Documents can be provided upon request in an alternate format for individuals with disabilities or in a language other than English for people with limited English skills. To request a document in another format or language, call DEQ in Portland at 503-229-5696, or toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696; or email [deqinfo@deq.state.or.us](mailto:deqinfo@deq.state.or.us).