

What are Brownfields?

Brownfields are former business and industrial sites that may pose risks to public health from exposure to hazardous chemicals. The level of contamination at brownfield sites varies greatly, though there is usually contaminated soil, groundwater, or building materials present. Developers may be concerned about high clean-up costs and, therefore, such sites are often left abandoned. Public Health professionals may be involved at brownfields sites during cleanup and redevelopment, when potential harmful exposures are most likely to occur.

Brownfields are often found in economically distressed areas, such as inner cities. However, these properties can be cleaned up and reused for the economic, health, and social benefit of a community. Government, developers, businesses and residents can work together on a brownfield by helping to remove some of the barriers to redevelopment, while promoting environmental protection and public health.

What are the Benefits of Redeveloping Brownfields?

When brownfield properties are redeveloped, they bring jobs, money, and vitality back into the community. Contaminated land and dilapidated buildings are cleaned up and turned into useful property. What was once an eyesore can become a park, a public service facility, or a successful business center that can revitalize neighborhoods and increase local property tax values. Also, fewer neglected properties can improve quality of life for local residents, workers, and visitors.

What is the Role of Public Health in Brownfields Redevelopment?

Public Health professionals in Georgia work to prevent disease and ensure that populations can remain healthy. Public Health is also about the environment in which people live and interact. Environmental conditions can have a profound effect on the mental and physical health of communities.

Local and state health departments evaluate community concerns and health and environmental data to determine whether the property poses any health threats to the public before, during, and after a brownfield clean up and redevelopment.



The Atlantic Steel Company in downtown Atlanta before brownfields redevelopment.

Community members want actions that promote economic redevelopment without sacrificing the environment and the health and safety of residents. To ensure that public health is protected during every phase of a brownfield redevelopment, residents, scientists, engineers, government agencies, lawyers, and developers work together.

What Is Being Done About Brownfield Sites in Georgia?

In January 1995, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) launched the Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative to encourage communities to redevelop brownfield sites. The goal of the Initiative is to create a safer and cleaner environment, new jobs, increased property tax values, protection of thousands of acres of “greenfields,” and a better community through redevelopment of used land. Brownfields property may be transformed for use by industry, business, parks or residential space.

The Brownfields Initiative also promotes building technologies and land use practices that reduce the likelihood of additional contamination. EPA’s Brownfields Program continually measures progress and reports results in order to track the Program’s performance.

In 2002, the Georgia Legislature adopted the Hazardous Site Reuse and Redevelopment Act (Brownfields Act). The Act provides a mechanism for those purchasing contaminated property to obtain a release of environmental liability. The Brownfields Act:

- Provides funds to state and local governments
- Removes liability barriers that prevent redevelopment
- Promotes the local workforce
- Provides job training in brownfield site cleanup

With assistance from EPA, Public Health agencies, the business community, and residents, approximately 500 contaminated properties in Georgia have been or are being redeveloped under the Brownfields Act.

What is Georgia Public Health Doing About Brownfields?

The Georgia Department of Public Health's role in brownfields redevelopment is to develop and implement strategies to ensure that public health issues are considered in the earliest phases of, and throughout, brownfields redevelopment.

Providing Public Health insight for brownfields redevelopment can not only reduce the potential for chemical exposures, but also encourage healthy behaviors and improve quality of life. For example, turning a brownfield into green space can increase physical activity by providing walking paths and other recreational areas. As a result, the rates of diabetes, heart disease, and obesity may be reduced. Green space and walking paths may also help reduce vehicle traffic and, thus, air pollution and the rates of asthma and other respiratory diseases. And, redeveloping land that was once contaminated may improve the sense of well being in communities through involving residents in positive growth and change.



The Atlantic Station complex, formerly Atlantic Steel Company, after brownfields redevelopment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

CHEMICAL HAZARDS PROGRAM

Georgia Department of Public Health
(404) 657-6534

www.dph.ga.gov/programs-hazards

GEORGIA'S BROWNFIELDS

**Georgia Environmental
Protection Division**
(404) 656-7802

www.gaepd.org/Documents/brownfields

BROWNFIELDS PROGRAM

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

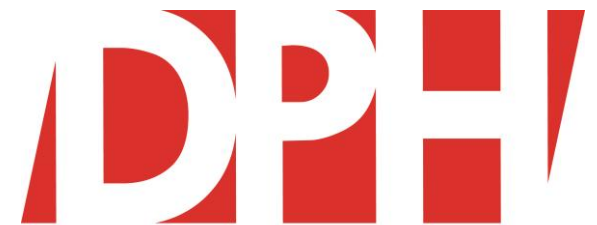
www.epa.gov/brownfields

Brownfields Redevelopment and Public Health



CHEMICAL HAZARDS PROGRAM

Environmental Health Section



Georgia Department of Public Health