News from Main Street!

In 2019, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded a $600,000 Brownfield Assessment Grant to a coalition led by Cochise County and supported by the cities of Bisbee, Douglas and Sierra Vista. Since that time, eight properties nominated by their owners have received a free environmental assessment using grant funding. These properties include the historic Chevrolet dealership building in Willcox, the Rivera building in Douglas, the old Bisbee High School, and the site of a former bus station on South Fab Avenue in Sierra Vista. The assessments help speed redevelopment and reuse of properties, eliminate concerns about unknown environmental liabilities, and make them more attractive to investors, buyers and developers.

What do the properties have in common?

All the properties assessed are “brownfields.” A brownfield is defined as “real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.” These properties were often, though not always, underutilized, vacant or abandoned and in need of renovation or tender loving care to facilitate their reuse. Sometimes these properties were for sale but there was some question about their history or previous use. The assessments helped to provide answers so owners could proceed with plans to revitalize properties to benefit the community.

What type of assessments were completed?

The properties had one or more of these assessments completed:

- **Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA)** - A Phase I ESA is a research study intended to assess the environmental condition of a property and identify potential areas where petroleum or hazardous substances may have been released. A Phase I ESA determines if any recognized environmental conditions (“RECs”) exist on the property.

- **Phase II ESA** - A Phase II ESA involves a physical study where environmental samples (soil, groundwater, etc.) are collected and analyzed to characterize the type, distribution and extent of substances in the environment (if present).

- **Regulated Building Material (RBM) Survey** - A RBM Survey involves a physical study where samples of potentially hazardous building materials are collected and tested to confirm if regulated substances are present. The hazardous building materials may include asbestos and/or lead-based paint.

MAJOR PROJECT MILESTONES & EVENTS

**October 2019**
Grant money first available from EPA

**February 2020**
First meeting of Brownfield Advisory Committee (BAC)

**May 2020**
Completed Brownfield Site Inventory

**June 2020**
Completed Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) and Regulated Building Materials (RBM) Survey for Rivera Building in Douglas

**Aug. & Dec. 2020**
Public information meetings

**Sept. - Dec. 2020**
Completed RBM Survey and Phase II ESA for 4 S Fry Blvd in Sierra Vista

**January 2021**
Completed RBM Survey for Hillcrest Apartments in Bisbee

**February 2021**
Completed Site Reuse Plan for former Chevrolet dealership in Willcox
What type of cleanup was required?

The EPA Brownfields Grant is not an enforcement program. Therefore, unless there is a threat to public health and safety, property owners are not required to cleanup their properties. The information from the free assessments that were performed with the EPA Grant were intended to provide owners with information to assist them with finding financing, buyers and/or partners who could assist with future development.

How can you enroll your property for an assessment?

It isn’t hard and doesn’t take long to enroll your property or building in the program for a free environmental assessment. Just go to the following website and click on the link that says “Site Nomination Form”: https://choosecochise.com/brownfield-sites

After you complete the two-page Site Nomination Form, send it to Dan Coxworth, Director of Development Services at Cochise County (dcoxworth@cochise.az.gov). You will typically hear back within two weeks regarding whether your site is approved for an assessment. Once approved, you will be asked to sign a two-page Site Access Agreement with Cochise County. The agreement will tell you specific information about the type of assessment that is appropriate for your property. That’s it! Easy Peezy!!

What properties are eligible?

Commercial and industrial properties are eligible for an assessment. They can be owned by the government (city, county, etc.), a non-profit organization, or a private party. There cannot be a legal or regulatory order requiring cleanup of the property (state and federal superfund sites are not eligible) and the owner cannot be potentially responsible for contamination that might be present. For example, if someone purchased a gas station but never owned or operated it, the property would be eligible for an assessment. However, the original owner or operator of gas station would not be eligible for an assessment of the property.

Want to learn more?

Visit https://choosecochise.com/brownfield-sites for additional information. This website contains success stories of other properties that have been redeveloped using Brownfield Grants, fact sheets for property owners and community members, a project schedule, a graphic that shows the process for the steps in each assessment, and YouTube videos that further describe the environmental site assessment the process. You can also contact the following individuals for more information:

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