

Past Property Uses May Result in a Brownfield Site

Looking around your community, what kinds of past land uses do you see? Many commercial, industrial and even some residential properties may be environmentally contaminated due to past uses at the site. People who live, work, go to school, play or exercise on or near a property may not realize it is a brownfield site. They may not know walking or playing on site can cause potential exposure to contaminants.

Communities can request technical assistance or seek funds from U.S. EPA, state or tribal programs to assess properties and to help determine the **history and past uses of a site and the likely presence, source(s) and extent of possible site contamination**. By understanding past property uses, communities can better understand health and environmental risks. Listed below are common past uses of brownfields.¹



Past Property Use

Example Sources

Possible Contaminants

Housing and Residential Areas



Single/multifamily housing areas, apartment buildings and other structures built before 1978; garages, sheds or barns.

Asbestos used in insulation of heating and cooling systems, floor, wall and roofing materials.
Lead from lead-based paint and materials in homes and apartments.
Petroleum and fuels stored for use in heating systems.
PCBs from caulk and paint, **pesticides** from pest control and **methamphetamines** from drug activity.

Gas Stations and Fuel Storage



Gas station buildings, structures/signs; underground storage tanks and piping; storage areas for oil, fuel, or solvents.

Gasoline, diesel, and heating **oil** used in fuels or heating systems.
 Volatile organic compounds (**VOCs**) and **solvents** used for cleaning and repair.
 Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (**PAHs**) from asphalts and as a combustion byproduct.

Railroad Facilities



Railroad lines, rail yards, rail spurs; roundhouse, rail car repair/maintenance facilities; train stations/depots.

Lead from lead-based paint used on older structures, signs, metal equipment, railcars and in repair.
Other metals used in railcar repair and treatment of wooden railroad ties.
PAHs from coal and diesel combustion, ash and fill disposal.
Pesticides or **herbicides** for weed control.
PCBs from power generation.

Automotive Repair



Structures and properties associated with automobile, truck and bus body repair; radiator and muffler repair.

Petroleum associated with fuels, spills and past gas or fuel operations and heating systems.
PAHs from coal and diesel combustion, asphalt, ash and fill disposal.
Lead and **other metals** used in vehicle, structure and sign paint, solder for radiator and car repair.
Asbestos from brake repair.

Dry Cleaners and Industrial Laundry



Small commercial and larger industrial laundry and dry cleaners.

VOCs or **solvents** used as degreasers and cleaning agents.
Lead from lead-based paint used on older structures.
Petroleum used to fuel equipment or associated with past fuel storage, heating or spills.

Manufacturers and Power Generation



Textile mills, factories and power plants; industrial operation boiler houses and power systems.

Lead from lead-based paint and lead used on structures and equipment.
Petroleum and fuel for industry equipment and heating.
PCBs and **PAHs** as a result of industrial power burning, ash and fill.
Other metals, solvents and other hazardous substances from manufacturing.

Agricultural Land and Facilities



Single family homes, barns, outbuildings and fencing, farm equipment.

Lead from lead-based paint coated structures and equipment.
Petroleum and diesel used to power agricultural equipment.
Asbestos from older structures and insulation and illegal dumping on agricultural and range lands.
Pesticides and **herbicides**.

Mines and Mining Operations



Mines, extraction and processing structures/equipment; tailing and waste spoil areas.

Petroleum and fuel used to power equipment operations and **PCBs** from power generation.
Asbestos from mining and materials use. **Lead** from mining, processing and lead-based paint on structures and equipment.
Other metals from mining, extraction, processing and industry operations.

Public and Commercial Buildings



Schools, hospitals, libraries, courthouses, jails, post offices and other governmental, community and commercial buildings built before 1978.

Asbestos from insulation and building materials.
Lead from lead-based paint used in public buildings and structures.
Petroleum for fleet fuel and heating operations.
Pesticides or other hazardous substances used in operations.

Metal Salvage and Recycling



Metal recycling, plating and scrap metal yards.

Petroleum from fuel and heating systems, tank and piping systems.
PAHs from asphalt or combustion.
VOCs from solvents and degreasers used in metal cleaning.
PCBs, **other metals** and hazardous substances used in operations.

Illegal Dumping



Unregulated solid waste, construction debris, tire and illegal dumping areas.

Lead from lead-based paint coated structures and materials.
Petroleum used in oil and fuel systems.
Other metals associated with a range of waste materials such as lighting waste materials.
PCBs, **solvents**, **asbestos**, **other metals** and other hazardous substances

¹U.S. EPA grant recipients are required to report about brownfield properties and grant funded activities through U.S. EPA's Assessment, Cleanup and Redevelopment Exchange System (ACRES). The following information about the history and description of a brownfield property does not reflect all examples of past uses reported at brownfield properties but provides a national snapshot. This data is publicly available at www.epa.gov/cleanups/cleanups-my-community