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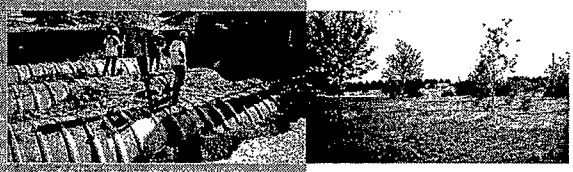
Underground Storage Tanks And Brownfields Sites



USTFIELDS INITIATIVE

Background

"Brownfields" is a nontechnical term applied to any idle or underutilized facility or property that is actually or perceived to be environmentally contaminated. Redevelopment of these sites is complicated by this actual or perceived contamination. Reclaiming brownfields properties makes the land productive again and helps to spur private and public sector investment in housing, job-producing businesses, and open space that can help communities improve their neighborhoods. Local leaders use this redevelopment as a way to improve and sustain their economies by recycling land instead of developing pristine land. But there can be substantial obstacles to cleaning up these sites, such as regulatory barriers, lack of private investment, and contamination and remediation issues.

"USTfields" applies to abandoned or underused industrial and commercial properties where redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination from federally-regulated underground storage tanks (USTs). Of the estimated 450,000 brownfields sites in the U.S., approximately 100,000-200,000 contain abandoned underground storage tanks or are impacted by petroleum leaks from them. However, petroleum contamination is generally excluded from coverage under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act and is not, therefore, covered under EPA's Brownfields program. EPA's Office of Underground Storage Tanks (OUST) is undertaking an USTfields initiative to address petroleum contamination from abandoned tanks generally excluded from Brownfields redevelopment. The initiative is also intended to take advantage of the many advances in the Brownfields work that could and should be applied to the numerous (and often smaller and more rural) USTfields sites.

Approach

The same problem-solving methods used for Brownfields – public and private sector involvement, defining and overcoming barriers, creating incentives – are also applicable to underground storage tank sites. Many of the Agency's cleanup and redevelopment initiatives (Brownfields Assessment, Brownfields Showcase, and Superfund and RCRA Redevelopment) are plagued by tank releases. The USTfields initiative is intended to:

- Take advantage of the expertise and infrastructure already being employed in similar EPA cleanup and redevelopment projects to maximize the utilization of available resources.
- Observe and learn from the challenges and accomplishments of pilot projects, with a view to disseminating the "lessons learned" to other states, tribes, territories, and local entities.
- Clean up and return unused properties to productive uses.
- Demonstrate what can be accomplished in the cleanup and redevelopment of sites impacted by underground storage tanks when federal, state, tribal, local, and private entities collaborate and combine their know-how and resources.

EPA believes the USTfields initiative will demonstrate how to better use limited resources to assess and clean up petroleum-impacted sites to foster their redevelopment.

USTfields Pilots

EPA expects to implement 50 state/local or EPA/tribal USTfields pilots in two phases. A set of 10 pilots will be selected and announced by EPA in Phase I (followed later by an additional 40 pilots in Phase II). EPA's goal in Phase I is to conduct a pilot in each of the 10 EPA regions. Each selected pilot will be allotted up to $100,000 of LUST Trust Funds in Fiscal Year 2001 to be used for two or more proposed sites. Each of the pilots or sites should fit within these parameters:

- To take maximum advantage of the expertise and infrastructure already being developed in the Brownfields and related EPA programs, the USTfields pilots should be a "supplement" or "attachment" to an existing EPA cleanup and redevelopment pilot, such as a Brownfields Assessment, Superfund or RCRA Redevelopment, or Brownfields Showcase Pilot. Of primary interest are situations where the cleanup of petroleum from federally-regulated underground storage tanks is a significant barrier (because of funding gaps or other regulatory exclusion) to the progress of these pilots.

- The USTfields pilots must involve corrective action with respect to petroleum releases from underground storage tanks and also should address the future reuse of sites, including but not limited to ecological, economic, and recreational uses. Funds will not be used for redevelopment but will be used to assess and/or clean up sites, which will ready them for redevelopment.

- A strong preference will be given to sites where MTBE may be a concern.

- The pilot must be a collaborative effort involving the input, close coordination, and agreement of all affected entities, be they federal, state, tribal, local, or private.

- EPA expects to fund 50 USTfields pilots. States and tribes will be responsible for selecting specific USTfields sites and for seeing that the uses of the funds meet all applicable statutory and regulatory requirements for corrective actions financed with LUST Trust Fund monies. EPA Regional offices will work with the initial 10 pilots to develop work plans for these projects. (The UST program's primary grant making authorities are to states and tribes, not local entities.)

Timing

The 10 initial pilots will begin in 2000; EPA expects the next 40 to be competitively selected in 2001.

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For further information on the USTfields Initiative, see www.epa.gov/oust/

EPA and the states have not yet negotiated the Cooperative Agreements to fund these pilots; therefore, activities are subject to change.