

Meeting Notes

Brownfields Working Group

Meeting #5-June 1, 2001

On Friday June 1, 2001 at 8:00 AM, the Brownfields Working Group met for fifth time. This subcommittee was established as part of a larger effort to streamline the site remediation regulatory processes.

The meeting agenda focused on a discussion of inventories and lists of Brownfields properties, in addition to following up on issues from previous meetings. The following points were discussed at the meeting:

The group asked for an update on the amendments to the Model Settlement Agreement. DEM reported that an amended model was still being developed in redline/strikeout form to address many of the points raised by the group and was still undergoing internal review within DEM.

The Brownfields caseload at DEM and how it was presented was discussed. Typically, when asked about how many Brownfields cases are completed or underway at DEM, the Department responds by providing a list of executed and pending settlement agreements. When asked how many staff are currently in the Brownfields program, DEM typically responds with the current level of staffing in the state sites program, which includes both Brownfields projects, the voluntary clean up projects, and other sites proceeding under state authority. The group felt that the actual caseload of project managers involved in Brownfields cases was not being effectively communicated since few people understand that these project managers have cases beyond Brownfields sites. It was recommended that DEM look at clearer ways to communicate the staffing and workload issues that have slowed some Brownfields projects.

The group briefly asked about the general Brownfields outreach package and asked whether it had been updated recently. It was the consensus of the group that this should be updated as soon as possible. DEM explained that it had uncovered a PowerPoint presentation that had been put together when the program was first established. This was being considered as a basis for content for the new web page. A copy of that PowerPoint presentation is attached.

The currently available inventories were discussed. These consisted mainly of the various lists of sites maintained by DEM and a larger list of properties available for sale and development maintained by EDC. The DEM lists included a list of state sites (marked as active or inactive as appropriate), the federal CERCLIS list of RI sites, and a list of sites that had been submitted to DEM but found not to be jurisdictional. The printed copies of these lists, which are available for review in the Office of Waste Management, are updated quarterly. DEM was asked to check on the accessibility of these lists over the web, for those lists that are already on the web, the frequency that they are updated.

The group recommended that EDC investigate adding a link in their database to any environmental information available at DEM. Right now, the DEM information is not consistently available on-line, but that should change as the transition to the PPTIS system continues throughout this year.

The EQuIS environmental data management system was explained. This is a commercial software product used to store and manipulate sampling data collected at sites. DEM explained that it was going out to bid to purchase this software, or an equivalent program, this summer. Once up and operational, the intent was to make all the environmental data available to the public and other parties. The group felt this should help other parties conduct investigations, will help market the program, and will help others understand the workload that the program must manage.

The group debated whether there was still a stigma attached to Brownfields sites. The stigma of being on a Brownfields list has been a barrier to creating a comprehensive list. The group felt that there were many educated buyers, developers and financial institutions now that may have an interest in these types of sites. However, the group wondered whether the current owner would want their site on such a list. The group felt this issue may be solved by better outreach materials outlining the tools and incentives available for sites that are on such a list. The benefits of being on the list, i.e. access to loans, tax incentives, technical assistance, may outweigh the fear of the perceived stigma.

GrowSmart RI outlined a plan they developed to task an intern to review existing databases throughout the state that may have Brownfields-like properties listed. They were looking at a one-month project focusing on the five urban core cities surrounding Providence to determine what was out there, what types of information were being tracked, and if it was worthwhile to continue a more in-depth analysis. The group strongly supported this effort and GrowSmart RI asked for parties willing to sit on a steering committee to advise on this effort. Interested parties would get back directly to GrowSmart RI. The group suggested some areas to investigate, including: fire department lists of abandoned or at-risk properties, emergency management agency lists and coordination on the CAMEO computer system, GIS databases and overlays, and possibly utility cut-offs to commercial properties.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 AM.