

Putting Public Health into Brownfield Redevelopment Projects: New York State Department of Health Great Lakes Community Project

The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) is developing new tools to assist communities with brownfield redevelopment projects. These tools will enable the NYSDOH to partner with communities to help them examine the extent and characteristics of brownfields in their neighborhoods and to look at the current status of their communities' health in a way that can be tracked over time.

What is the NYSDOH doing related to brownfield redevelopment in the Great Lakes region?

The NYSDOH is working with the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) on a new project to develop an inventory of brownfields and to investigate different ways to measure community health in communities near the Great Lakes where brownfield redevelopment is occurring. The NYSDOH will partner with interested communities to incorporate new measures of community health and well-being (also called community health status indicators) as part of their brownfield redevelopment projects. Examples of available community health status indicators include information on age of housing, household income, and asthma hospitalization rates.

What is a brownfield?

A brownfield is an abandoned or unused industrial or commercial property for which redevelopment poses a problem because of real or perceived contamination of the land.

ATSDR has been working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) on a project called the Brownfield/Land Re-use Initiative. The focus of this initiative is to ensure that public health concerns are taken into consideration in all redevelopment projects. Incorporating health indicators into brownfield redevelopment decisions can provide an accurate snap shot of a community's general well-being and a better idea of what factors can best benefit community health overall in the redevelopment planning process.

The NYSDOH will use existing tools such as the ATSDR Brownfields/Land Revitalization Action Model (ATSDR Action Model*) to evaluate the effects of brownfields redevelopment on public health and develop sustainable improvements within the community. The ATSDR Action Model is built around four steps or questions for the community:

1. *What are the health issues in the community?*
2. *How can development address these issues?*
3. *What are the corresponding community health benefits?*
4. *What data are needed to measure change?*

Why we need your help

Community members offer a unique sense of their community's social history, economic history, culture, needs, physical and functional attributes which combine to make a clear picture of how a community operates on a day to day basis. Involving community stakeholders in the project better shapes redevelopment opportunities in ways that will help the community grow and improve. Input from area residents will inform the measures of health and well-being used in NYSDOH's analyses as well as the types of products produced.

NYSDOH Great Lakes Community Project Activities:

- Develop an inventory of brownfield and other related sites throughout New York State including information on location, former use, contamination, exposure concerns, and off-site impacts;
- Collect health, socio-demographic, educational, property use and other data types;
- Investigate health status measures;
- Develop measures of community health and well-being;
- Create baseline community health indicators;
- Develop tools that can be used to track changes in community health and well-being over time (after redevelopment);
- Create maps to analyze, visualize, and report on identified sites.

What is in it for your community?

Community stakeholders will benefit from a health assessment that is specific to their community's biological, physical and social environment. This can help shape a community's future goals for redevelopment in a way which will maximize community well-being and can serve as a baseline health assessment before the redevelopment process is completed.

Collaboration will enhance working relationships with stakeholders by soliciting and sharing information. The NYSDOH will provide information related to public health and brownfield programs and services at the local, State, and Federal levels. The NYSDOH will offer additional support to the community in the form of advice and expertise in environmental and health issues.

Transparency is important in any project between the NYSDOH and the community. The NYSDOH plans to share work products, maps, and community health information that may help the community make future management decisions and set priorities for remediation and/or redevelopment.

For more information:

New York State Department of Health Great Lakes Community Project, contact:

Betsy Prohonic at 518.402.7530

Don Miles at 518.402.7880

email: beei@health.state.ny.us

How are environmental agencies involved with brownfield redevelopment?

Brownfield remediation and reuse is chiefly overseen by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) or the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). The USEPA and NYSDEC provide the expertise and technical oversight to ensure that contaminated properties are cleaned up during the redevelopment process, making the land suitable and healthy for public use.

**ATSDR Action Model* at the ATSDR Brownfield webpage at: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/sites/brownfields/>