

## Brownfields

### The Environmental Problem No-One Has Heard Of

**B**rownfields are abandoned sites with enough toxic contamination to pose a risk to human health, but not contaminated enough to be Superfund sites. Most people have never heard of brownfields, but they have an impact on all of our lives. Most common in urban areas as abandoned commercial sites, factories, and gas stations, brownfields contribute to economic deterioration and social despair in the communities they scar, and encourage urban flight and suburban sprawl.

**M**any states, including our neighbors Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, have passed legislation designed to bring brownfields back onto municipal tax rolls and into productive use. New York has not. The implications of this failure are enormous: urban decay is escalating as businesses move to other states and revitalization opportunities are lost to the suburb, leading to irreversible environmental damage, economic decline and a fraying of the social fabric.

**F**ortunately, many individuals, local governments and organizations are coming together from a variety of perspectives with the view that New York must come to grips with its brownfields problem. Bankers, real estate developers, business interests, community groups, municipalities and environmentalists share a common interest in supporting legislation that could lead to real solutions.

EPL/Environmental Advocates is leading the fight for a comprehensive brownfields program, which should contain several critical elements:

- cleanup standards that are clearly protective of public health and the environment;
- enforcement actions against those responsible for the contamination;
- community involvement in planning and decision making regarding the reuse of sites;
- financial incentives, such as tax breaks and low interest loans, for those who want to clean up contaminated sites for a beneficial reuse;
- a fund for the cleanup of "orphan" sites lacking an immediate development interest.



**E**PL/Environmental Advocates believes that the health of New York's cities is an important measure of the state's economic, environmental and social well-being. The current concern for brownfields redevelopment is an indication that champions of economic growth, community-based organizations and environmental activists alike agree that urban areas have been neglected for too long. Beginning to eliminate the blight that brownfields represent will reverse the trend of urban decay and set a course for real revitalization.

## THE STRATEGY

**W**e believe that 1999 is the year that comprehensive brownfields legislation can be passed by the New York State Legislature. Currently, EPL/Environmental Advocates is participating in a brownfields roundtable, working with representatives of municipal government, businesses and the environmental community. This group is actively involved in thinking through and drafting brownfields legislation. We are also working to get Assembly and Senate sponsors to introduce the legislation with strong bipartisan support.



- **Contact your State Assemblymember and Senator**, and urge them to support comprehensive brownfields cleanup legislation.

Senator \_\_\_\_\_  
New York State Senate  
Albany, NY 12247  
(518) 455-2800

Assemblymember \_\_\_\_\_  
New York State Assembly  
Albany, NY 12248  
(518) 455-4100

- **Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.** This will help spread the word that brownfields are a serious problem that affects all of us, not just those in urban areas.

- **Support EPL/Environmental Advocates.** Members are our political strength. Legislators need to know that their constituents are concerned and involved. By working together, we can help solve the brownfields problem.

### For Further Information:

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Or visit Environmental Advocates' Web Page:  
[www.envadvocates.org](http://www.envadvocates.org)