



Key Points

- *The EPA estimates that between 425,000 and 1 million brownfields exist throughout the United States.*
- *There are more than 5 million acres of abandoned industrial sites in our cities.*
- *Legislation is needed to make redeveloping these sites economically feasible.*
- *Safe, sustainable redevelopment of brownfields would open economic development opportunities for states and localities, protect the environment, and enhance the life and health of existing communities where people live and work.*
- *Many brownfields offer tremendous opportunities for creating new jobs and mixed-use developments that combine residences, commercial facilities, parks, civic spaces, and affordable housing.*

PROMOTING HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES

Clean Up America's Brownfields

AIA Position

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) is concerned about abandoned industrial sites in every state that are contaminated with residues of past industrial activity. This contamination stymies redevelopment, harms existing communities, limits economic development and job creation, and leads to sprawl and uncontrolled growth. As a result, Federal legislation is needed to expedite site cleanup and foster economic development of former industrial properties.

Action Sought

The AIA seeks the passage of legislation aimed at helping communities by redeveloping brownfields. During the first session of the 110th Congress, Representatives Stephanie Tubbs-Jones (D-OH) and Mike Turner (R-OH) introduced H.R. 3080, America's Brownfield Cleanup Act of 2007. H.R. 3080 has attracted a number of bipartisan cosponsors and addresses the need for tax credits for brownfields remediation. The AIA strongly encourages Congress to pass this legislation.

The AIA also believes that Congress should provide additional funding to the EPA's Brownfields Program. This program should further be amended to give funding preference to projects that will utilize energy efficient/green building design.

Explanation and Justification

A brownfield is an abandoned, idled, or underused property where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived contamination. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates there are as many as 425,000 brownfields throughout the United States. Some estimates show there are 5 million acres of abandoned industrial sites in our cities—roughly the same amount of land occupied by 60 of our largest cities.

Turning these areas into mixed community uses, such as parks, shopping areas, learning centers, and affordable housing, is a great opportunity. Brownfields reuse will increase the local tax base, create jobs, revitalize neighborhoods, and extend environmental protection for all citizens.

What America Thinks: In a recent nationwide poll of voters (1,000 sample, margin of error +/- 3.1) conducted by two respected national pollsters—The Tarrance Group, a Republican firm, and Lake Snell and Perry, a Democratic firm—68 percent of voters indicated that “Cleaning up contaminated areas caused by pollution so they can be used for environmentally safe new development” was, among a series of projects that the government could spend tax dollars on, a “very important” priority.

Interestingly, voters in rural, suburban, and urban areas all rated the issue of equal importance, as did all age groups. Also, 80 percent of Hispanics rated the issue “very important,” while 70 percent of all women and 75 percent of non-college-educated men did as well.

In addition to those who rated the issue “very important,” 27 percent rated it “somewhat important.” That means an overwhelming 95 percent of the electorate believes cleaning up and redeveloping contaminated sites is an important priority in the expenditure of their tax dollars.

Also, 82 percent of voters polled agreed with the statement, “Federal, state and local governments should focus on revitalizing existing communities as a top priority, instead of extending public services to new communities that have not yet been built.” Of the 82 percent, 52 percent—a majority of the national electorate polled—“strongly agree” while 30 percent “somewhat agree.”