

Common Brownfield Myths and Facts

Myth	Facts
Brownfields are all large, former industrial or manufacturing sites.	While some brownfields are large former industrial sites, the majority of the estimated 500,000 to 1 million brownfields in the United States are small properties like dry cleaners, vacant lots, or gas stations.
A site must actually be contaminated to be considered a brownfield.	The perception that a property may be contaminated can be just as great a barrier to redevelopment as actual contamination. Therefore, sites where contamination is merely perceived, and site conditions are unknown, are still considered brownfields. One third of the brownfield sites that have been assessed with EPA brownfields funding have turned out to be free from significant contamination.
Superfund sites are brownfields, or brownfields are Superfund sites.	Under the statutory definition, brownfields do not include Superfund sites, i.e. sites that are on or have been proposed for listing on EPA's Superfund National Priorities List of severely contaminated sites. Currently, only approximately 1,200 Superfund sites are designated. Brownfields are much less contaminated than Superfund sites, much less expensive to address, much less complicated by regulatory and legal constraints, and much more amenable to voluntary, cooperative approaches.
Brownfields are only an urban problem.	Contaminated properties affect nearly every town, large and small. Small and rural communities are impacted not only by former industrial sites, but also by closed gas stations, dry cleaners, old dumps, contaminated rail yards, mine-scarred lands, agricultural wastes such as pesticides, and many other challenges. Many EPA brownfield grants have been awarded to communities with less than 25,000 people.
Brownfields are an environment-only issue, and an EPA-only problem.	While brownfields by definition involve real or perceived environmental contamination, the solutions to brownfields problems almost always involve much broader issues including economic reuse, neighborhood improvement, infrastructure and transportation capacity, job creation, tax incentives, crime prevention, and many other approaches. Successful brownfield reuse generally occurs when economic and community development issues are addressed along with contamination concerns. The multi-disciplinary nature of brownfields is one reason that more than 20 federal agencies, and a broad range of state, local, private, and non-profit entities are now involved in brownfields revitalization.