

Forum provides info on contaminated site cleanup

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Huerfano County World
Friday, May 8, 2009

Public-private partnerships urged to secure funding for remediation efforts

Walsenburg – Walsenburg realtors and members of the community got together Monday, May 4 at the Community Center to learn about underground pollution, how to fund the cleaning and get it certified and ready for sale or use by forming alliances with each other and the local government. These alliances in turn will make the process of finding funds smoother and more likely.

“Knowing that these properties are clean and safe is a key to the redevelopment and revitalization of the city Walsenburg. And the certification process with a letter of comfort can break the superfund title trail,” Jesse Silverstein of the Colorado Brownfields Foundation said.

“Superfund is the 800 pound gorilla in the closet. Banks don’t want to fund clean-up or get themselves roped into funding clean-up on property they have no responsibility for. Superfund can reach back through the chain of title and name anyone a “responsible party” for clean-up.”

The prospect of superfund being applied to any property that may actually be or is perceived to be contaminated has frightened many real estate brokers and prospective buyers away from purchasing or selling property in.

Brownfield is defined as real property upon which expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant, according to 42 USC 9601 (39)(A).

There are several brownfields in the Walsenburg area. The abandoned dry cleaner on west 7th street is a good example of a brownfields site.

“There are about 30,000 dry cleaners in the US and as many as 75 percent of them are contaminated. And most of these are less than 50 years old which means they have been using PCEs,” Joe Seracuse from Brown and Caldwell Environmental Engineering and consulting points out.

“Prior to 50 years ago many dry cleaners were using things like gasoline, toluene, or other petrochemicals and solvents to clean with. Then everyone switched to the poly-chlorides but they were still dumping these cleaners into the sewer systems or storing them in metal containers that began leaking over time.”

Then in the early 1980’s environmental law began getting passed at the state and federal level and dumping was regulated.

“What we look for in a phase 1 assessment is the parts per billion. Usually 5 ppb is all we need to determine groundwater pollution. That’s like filling INVESCO field at Mile High stadium with softballs and trying to find the 5 that are painted pink,” Jeff Reichmuth from Altus Environmental explains.

The phase 1 assessment is based on drilling wells to get soil and groundwater samples and gathering soil gas samples to determine the extent of the PCE plume.

The usual cost for assessment and clean up at these sites usually ranges from \$100,000 to \$200,000. So where is this money going to come from?

Most realtors or banks don’t want to pump money into the clean-up of these sites because they may never recoup the expenditures. And potential buyers usually have a hard time putting together that much cash on top of the money needed for the purchase.

“The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Division of Oil and Public Safety, Remediation section are the ones to contact when these issues may be suspect,” Tim Kelley of OPS said.

“We will work with the banks, realtors, and buyers to find funding. Many sources are available. Federal stimulus money, state funds and Brownfields grants are a few sources to look at.”

Kelley is quick to point out that funding the process works best if private groups and individuals team up with city and county governments when seeking the funds.

“Foundations as well as the state and the federal governments see accountability and transparency as paramount to the funding process. Form a team then get with the City of Walsenburg and the County Commission. It will work for you,” Kelley points out.

“Getting these sites cleaned and to a place where they can be sold is critical to the redevelopment and revitalization of Walsenburg. If this city is to grow and be healthy then finding and cleaning the brownfields has to be done,” Jesse Silverstein reemphasized.

This article appeared in the Friday, May 8, 2009 edition of the Huerfano County World on page 6.