



# In Chicopee, Turning Problem Sites Into Opportunities

## CHICOPEE, MA

The City of Chicopee, Massachusetts typifies countless older manufacturing communities in New England, its former industrial areas now lying unused and, in many cases, contaminated. But through the city's efforts, and with assistance from EPA and other federal and state agencies, these "brownfields" are finally being viewed as opportunities rather than problems. One of Chicopee's former brownfields is now home to a \$5 million, digital broadcasting station, enabled through federal partnerships and by an agreement to split environmental insurance costs between the city and the site's developer.

Containing nine known sites with varying levels of contamination, Chicopee was a natural choice for a Brownfields Assessment Pilot grant from EPA. The initial \$59,000 grant was used to assess the old Bay State Wire Company site, where two buildings that had once housed a wire and metal parts manufacturer had sat abandoned since 1988. The site's buildings were reduced to charred brick frames in a 1990 fire, and scorched barrels of oil, plasticizers, and other contaminants remained inside, creating a blight and a severe hazard.

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## JUST THE FACTS:

- After assessments on the Bay State Wire Company site leveraged a \$310,000 cleanup, EPA supplemented Chicopee's \$59,000 Brownfields Pilot with an additional \$30,000.
- The Pilot next targeted the 3.75-acre former Conway Bedding site. Again, cleanup funding was leveraged following Pilot assessments.
- The Conway Bedding site was eventually purchased by a CNBC subsidiary, as the site of a new, \$5 million, state-of-the-art digital broadcasting station.

*An official groundbreaking for the new, \$5 million digital broadcasting station was held in September 1998, and the station began operations in December 1999, creating several new full-time jobs in addition to the more than 100 employees who relocated.*

**EPA's** Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative is designed to empower states, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. A brownfield is a site, or portion thereof, that has actual or perceived contamination and an active potential for redevelopment or reuse. EPA is funding: assessment demonstration pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to assess brownfields sites and to test cleanup and redevelopment models; job training pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to provide training for residents of communities affected by brownfields to facilitate cleanup of brownfields sites and prepare trainees for future employment in the environmental field; and, cleanup revolving loan fund programs (each funded up to \$500,000 over five years) to capitalize loan funds to make loans for the environmental cleanup of brownfields. These pilot programs are intended to provide EPA, states, tribes, municipalities, and communities with useful information and strategies as they continue to seek new methods to promote a unified approach to site assessment, environmental cleanup, and redevelopment.

Assessments performed through the Brownfields Pilot confirmed the release of trichlorethylene (TCE), oil, grease, and cadmium to the site's soil and groundwater. Pinpointing areas of contamination enabled a \$310,000 cleanup effort to proceed, funded by a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). All of the contaminant-filled drums were removed, contaminated soil was hauled away, underground storage tanks were excavated, and the charred buildings were demolished. The cleaned site was appraised by the city, and has already received interest from two adjacent manufacturers looking to expand onto the property. The city has specified that jobs must be created through the site's future use.

The rapid transformation of the Bay State Wire Company property led to additional Brownfields Pilot funding for Chicopee; in May 1997, EPA provided \$30,000 for assessments at other properties. The Pilot targeted a 3.75-acre former manufacturing site in the low-income neighborhood of Williamansett. Uncertainties about contamination scared developers and purchasers away from the site, known as the Conway Bedding property, which the city had foreclosed on in 1996.

Brownfields Pilot assessments led to demolition of the site's buildings and cleanup of the property, again paid for with HUD CDBG funding. Five electrical transformers containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were removed, as were a 6,600-gallon storage tank and several containers of oil. The property was also cleared of mice and rats, which had overrun the site during its years of abandonment.

Within two weeks of advertising this newly cleaned site through a Request-for-Proposals process, the city was approached by Benedict Broadcasting, an affiliate of CNBC. The company eventually purchased the site for \$250,000, as the location of a new, \$5 million, state-of-the-art digital broadcasting station. As part of its arrangement with the city, Benedict Broadcasting required sharing equally with the city the costs of environmental insurance for the site, to guarantee the company's protection from liability in case additional contaminants were discovered during redevelopment. An official groundbreaking for the new broadcasting station was held in September 1998, and the station began operations in December 1999, creating several new full-time jobs in addition to the more than 100 employees who relocated.

Considering the success of the Bay State Wire Company and Conway Bedding sites, it's hardly surprising that in September 1998, EPA awarded Chicopee an additional \$111,000 for Brownfields Pilot assessments, bringing total Pilot funding to \$200,000. At least three other idle properties in Chicopee have been targeted by the Pilot, and may someday undergo the same transformations as the first two. For more information on the Chicopee Brownfields Pilot, contact Diane Kelley at (617) 918-1424.

## **CONTACTS:**

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Visit the EPA Brownfields Web site at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>

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