

EPA Region 8 Brownfields Program

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Cleans Up Brownfields with Public Health Risks



EPA's Brownfields Tribal Response Program and Cleanup grants are helping the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe mitigate public health risks associated with brownfields.

Residents Help to Identify Brownfields

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's 2.3 million acres stretch across portions of North and South Dakota, with a population of more than 10,000 enrolled members divided into eight districts. The Tribe has received EPA Brownfields Section 128(a) Tribal Response Program (TRP) funding since 2005 to create and enhance its environmental response program.

One of the first activities the Tribal Department of Environmental Regulation initiated with the TRP funding was development of a brownfields inventory. Today, this inventory includes more than 30 sites with known or potential contamination, most of which are abandoned buildings containing asbestos and lead. Quarterly public meetings and a monthly newsletter help to promote the program to area residents, who have been instrumental in identifying brownfields. Once potential sites are identified, their status is verified by Brownfields Tribal Response Program staff before being added to the inventory. An Environmental Quality Commission representative from each of the eight districts prioritizes sites to determine which should be assessed further.

Environmental Assessments Determine if Risks Exist

To date, TRP funding has been used to complete environmental assessments on seven sites; the Selfridge Cheese Plant, Old Smee School and Bullhead Community Center were all cleaned up as a result. In the summer of 2009, EPA Region 8's Brownfields Program provided contractual support through its Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) Program to conduct environmental characterizations on four additional sites around Fort Yates, including the Fort Yates Landfill, the Old Teachers Quarters, the Old Warrior Motel and the Old Stockade Building. Based on the results of these assessments, the Tribe will apply for EPA grants to clean up the contamination and return the sites to productive use.



Public health risks at the Old Smee School were cleaned up and the site was converted to open space.



KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Cleaned up three sites with lead and asbestos public health concerns
- Conducted environmental assessments on 11 sites
- Developed an inventory of more than 30 sites
- Provided an asbestos and lead training
- Developing a hazardous waste and tribal response code

Cleanup Mitigates Public Health Risks

The former Selfridge Cheese Plant represents the Tribe's first cleanup success. This approximately one-acre property was home to a cheese plant that was abandoned in 1988 after nearly 30 years of operation. An environmental assessment determined that the facility contained asbestos and lead-based paint contamination. Since the crumbling building was located on the main street in town, adjacent to a head start school and residential neighborhoods, there was a high risk of exposures to the public. TRP funding was used to both assess and clean up this property, which was successfully converted to public open space in 2007.

The Old Smee School and Bullhead Community Center were also partially collapsed buildings that presented lead and asbestos contamination risks and were converted to open space. The Old Smee School was cleaned up in 2007 using a \$200,000 EPA Brownfield Cleanup grant, while EPA's Emergency Response Program conducted cleanup at the Bullhead Community Center in 2009. Because of the Reservation's rural location, transport of materials during demolition and cleanup posed a significant challenge; materials had to be transported to landfills 30 miles away for the Smee School project, and 70 miles away for the Selfridge Cheese Plant project.

Capacity Building to Enhance Environmental Response

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has been focused on enhancing its environmental response program beyond brownfields assessment and cleanup. For example, since most of the area's brownfields have lead and asbestos contamination, the Tribe hosted a lead and asbestos training in 2008, and six tribal members are now licensed by the state to work on these projects. In addition, the Tribe is in the midst of updating its solid waste code, developing a hazardous waste response code, and is establishing offices to implement its enforcement program. The Tribe plans to build on its initial successes by continuing to assess and clean up high priority brownfields that pose a public risk, and by developing policies to prevent and enforce against future contamination.

"We are very excited about the cleanup [of the Old Smee School]. By addressing the contamination, our community is safer and cleaner."

—Hans Bradley
Public Information Office, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe



An environmental assessment was completed at the Fort Yates Landfill using TBA support.

LEVERAGED RESOURCES

- \$945,925 from the EPA Brownfields Tribal Response Program
- \$200,000 from an EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant
- \$153,000 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Native Americans

Technical assistance from:

- \$60,000 in contractual support from EPA Region 8 Targeted Brownfields Assessments
- \$500,000 in contractual support from the EPA Region 8 Emergency Response Program

For additional information, please contact:

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