

Transcript for Video
“Our Land, Our Legacy – The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act”
United States Environmental Protection Agency, EPA 530-C-07-003
January 2007

INTRODUCTION

Narrator Voice Over:

Our nation’s land is one of our most precious resources, yet there are thousands of contaminated sites in communities around the country, a legacy of our nation’s industrial past. Contaminated sites that are vacant or underused are referred to as Brownfields. States and the Environmental Protection Agency – the EPA – have been working to revitalize contaminated sites into properties that provide income, jobs, recreation, green space and other benefits to their communities.

Vernice Miller-Travis (Executive Director, Groundwork USA):

You really have to sell people on the Brownfields Program. People didn’t understand it. People didn’t understand why would you want to go and reclaim these sites. Why would you want to do redevelopment on them, and why would you want to do it in some of these really difficult places.

Narrator Voice Over:

Cleanup of facilities that have operated as hazardous waste treatment or disposal facilities since 1984 are regulated by EPA and States through the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act commonly referred to as RCRA. 40 states now are authorized to run RCRA clean up programs. By the year 2020, the goal is to address nearly 4000 RCRA facilities.

This is a story about the remarkable results that can occur when we clean up sites in a way that not only protects human health and the environment, but also supports reuse. And it’s about how flexibility, a collaborative, cooperative process, and the commitment to a shared vision changed the face of three diverse American communities: – Casper, Wyoming; Atlanta, Georgia, and Omaha, Nebraska.

CASPER, WYOMING

Narrator Voice Over:

This 4000-acre refinery facility is located on the banks of the North Platte River near downtown Casper, Wyoming. Refinery operations ended in 1991, leaving behind a site contaminated with nearly a century’s worth of oil spillage, sludge and more than 200 miles of buried pipeline. The

property was fenced, left idles, and eventually was acquired by BP in a merger with Amoco in 1998.

Vickie Meredith (Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality):

There were big metal structures; there were oil pits, rebar sticking out of the river, and waste. It was unsafe to be in this river. It was soils, barren soils, it was a barren wasteland, with metal structures, and it was very ugly, with a big fence around it.

Narrator Voice Over:

In the early 1990s, the relationship between the refinery owner and the community was contentious. Citizens, unhappy with the lack of cleanup at the abandoned contaminated property, filed lawsuits.

Melvin and Carol Long (Casper Residents):

Like I said, I was good and mad... Well I was determined that they were going to hear from me, and he was too... We started dragging grandkids to meeting two or three times a week, you know, for years.

Narrator Voice Over:

In 1998, the court ordered the refinery owner, regulatory agencies and the community to form a partnership to determine cleanup and revitalization activities at the site. The site was cleaned up under Wyoming's Voluntary Cleanup Program. The state and the owner used a streamlined process in developing and approving cleanup decisions and documents.

Felix Flechas (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 8)

We had a very unique process that occurred here that involved a collaboration between the local community, the state, the federal government, as well as the industry that was operating this refinery.

Vickie Meredith (WY DEQ):

What we did was we sat down and we figured out what the document needed to say ahead of time, what the work plans needed to do ahead of time, we did that collaboratively. And then when we did get the document, then there were no surprises at all.

Alice Kraft (Executive Director, Amoco Reuse Agreement Joint Powers Board):

The key to the success came when Joe Deschamp came on board as project manager, and agreed to do an entire cleaning process of the Platte River Commons property down to eight feet. Remove all the pipe, all the concrete, and all the contaminated soil, and that way every inch of that ground was tested and proven clean.

Joe Deschamp (Environmental Business Manager, BP):

...We went out to the community and said, "What do you want out here? ...And they gave us a laundry list of things. Did some drawings, some figures actually showed what they would like to see out here. And then we were able to take that and go forward with it as we worked through the collaborative process working out the remedies with the WDEQ. And I thought that was an immense help, to be able to see what the end product was like.

Narrator Voice Over:

A clear development plan allowed future use considerations to be incorporated into risk –based cleanup activities geared to anticipated future use and risks of contamination left on site. The plan also factored in remediation features to be incorporated into the new use designs.

For example, the Robert Trent Jones championship golf course, the focal point of the development, was designed to address waste left in place using integrated wetlands to treat the water and special landscaping to draw water to the drains.

A subsurface barrier wall was installed to limit seepage of contaminated groundwater into the river. Wells are blended into the new landscape as pumping and treatment of contaminated groundwater will continue for decades.

The 200 miles of underground piping were recovered and recycled rather than put in a landfill. Contaminated soils were disposed of in an off-site solid waste management unit.

Clean up was conducted in phases to accommodate early revitalization activities.

Joe Deschamp (BP):

It was pretty phenomenal... Because we had so much going on at one time. We had demolition, cleanup going on in one area, and at the same time, right behind them, we had the redevelopment people coming in.

Narrator Voice Over:

In the early 1990s, the Casper site was vacant, and fenced. The north Platt River was unusable, and the community was dissatisfied.

Felix Flechas (US EPA):

We have turned that around. There is a championship golf course here. There is a whitewater kayak course next to the refinery where previously there were impounded waters that didn't smell or look good. And we have a business park. All of these come together to add vitality to the

community, as well as economic potential for future revenues which would come into the community.

Narrator Voice Over:

In 2005, the site received the prestigious Phoenix Award for outstanding Brownfields redevelopment.

Joe Deschamp (BP):

Well, I'm very proud about what's been done here. As a member of the community I was very interested in the very beginning and that was one of the reasons I wanted to be involved with the project.

... We can enjoy the property, we can develop it, we can build office buildings, we can golf, and we can recreate in the river and on site, and at the mean time still be continuing the remainder of our cleanup.

...It is definitely, I think, a great success

ATLANTIC STATION, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Narrator Voice Over:

Atlanta, Georgia, faced revitalization challenges at the 138-acre site of the old Atlantic Steel Mill. The facility was located in the very heart of a booming metropolis, in what would have been an ideal development location. Most of the site was idle. The issue was how to address such a large contaminated property in a timely and protective manner while meeting the cities needs to revitalize the area.

Stan Meiburg (USEPA, Region 4 Deputy Regional Administrator):

This site had been a steel mill for over a hundred years. In fact, one of the general statements was that this was the mill that built Atlanta.

David Goldberg (Communications Director, Smart Growth America):

Well I think when it was first announced that there was going to be development on this site; a lot of people were excited because it had been a fallow industrial site for a long time. There was a very small operation here, but it had laid across the interstate, people saw this rusting hulk and people weren't sure what would ever happen with it.

Narrator Voice Over:

The use of a risk-based approach to cleanup, and innovative and flexible approaches to meet RCRA's cleanup goals, were key to moving the project through the cleanup process.

Stan Meiburg (USEPA):

The innovative thing we did here was to recognize that in-fill development like this in a high-growth area like Atlanta was something that was going to

be good for a whole lot of environmental values. Reuse of the land, better air quality by improving access to public transportation, and better compact housing.

Narrator Voice Over:

A strong partnership, vision and commitment by the city, state and federal regulators, local businesses, and community were crucial to success.

Jim Jacoby (Chief Executive, Jacoby Development)

The governor came up with the Green light committee which was a very novel approach, putting all of the heads of the agencies together in a room and saying you can't leave unless there is a green light, no yellow lights, no red lights.

Bill Mundy (Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division)

Decisions had to be made in real time so there wasn't a lot of document exchanges. So, one thing to make it successful is that you have to have a representative of the government have the authority to make the decisions.

Narrator Voice Over:

The site was cleaned up with a risk based approach under a state hazardous waste permit, which was terminated once the cleanup conditions were met. To address concerns about future misuse of the property, a conservation easement was put in place to limit unsafe use of the property. Throughout the process there was a strong emphasis on smart growth principles and sustainability.

Bill Mundy (GA DNR):

Rather than disposing of the concrete offsite, the developer crushed all the concrete up and used it as fill material in different parts of the site. So, that also reduced the truck traffic in the area and it also was recycling the material, which was another feature that made this popular with the public because they did try to recycle things. They did try to use good judgment and be mindful of the environment as they were moving through the process.

Jim Jacoby (Jacoby Development):

Everybody had looked at the real estate and said, you know, this is fantastic real estate, but what are the environmental issues. And I think we came at it differently than just a real estate play, it was really what could we do to remediate the project and how could we make this a sustainable project. So interestingly about Atlantic Station, every type of development works here. Hotels work here, residential works here.

The whole project now is campus certified, the first one by the U.S. Green Building Council in the country.

Narrator Voice Over:

With it's use of collaborative partnership among the stakeholders, incorporation of smart growth and sustainable development principles, the inclusion of many types of uses such as residential, commercial and greenspace, the successful Atlantic Station project won the prestigious Phoenix award in 2005.

David Goldberg (Smart Growth America):

The three things that made this a success were the flexibility that was shown at all levels of government. The deep and early involvement of the neighborhoods and the community as a whole was very important to making this work. And the third thing would be the design elements, and a willingness of the developer to be flexible and to consider changes to designs that weren't just off-the-shelf suburban kind of development, but really good city development

OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Narrator Voice Over:

Often RCRA facilities are located within larger revitalization areas, which was the case in Omaha. Located a short distance from Omaha's airport and adjacent to downtown, the Missouri riverfront property had become a dismal gateway to an otherwise thriving city. Cleanup efforts had been stalled for years. Omaha's challenge was to revitalize a stretch of the river that had several contaminated properties, including two large RCRA facilities --- the ASARCO lead smelting facility and the Union Pacific maintenance yard.

Hal Daub (Metropolitan Entertainment and Convention Authority. Former Omaha Mayor and Former U.S. Congressman):

If the city doesn't have a heart, the city dies. Omaha's heart was dying, and our riverfront was dead and polluted.

Jane Miller (Gallup Organization):

As we began to explore Omaha, Hal Daub had said to us, let's look at the riverfront. And a few of us went, the riverfront – um, what river?

Narrator Voice Over:

The City of Omaha took the lead in bringing the property owners to the table in a collaborative effort.

So that the risk-based clean-ups could move expeditiously, some facilities, were revitalized under the Nebraska State Voluntary Clean up Program. The Union Pacific facility was under a RCRA consent order.

Hal Daub (Former Omaha Mayor):

I could see that this was going to be a very complicated project. But if we could plant the seed of developing a public-private partnership to involve our Chamber of Commerce and involve the three businesses themselves, we could sit around the table and organize an idea of how to clean up this site and create adaptive reuse -- river trails, parks, a convention arena center as the heart of it, the Qwest Center, as the anchor for that development initiative.

Jay Ringenberg (Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality):

Well, the process started with cleaning up the Asarco Refinery, that's clear on the end of the river here, and that was an old lead refinery that had been closed. And, that was cleaned up over a two or three year period. And that kind of was the catalyst for the rest of the redevelopment up here.

Narrator Voice Over:

The reuse vision, which included a state of the art "Qwest" convention center, the headquarters of the Gallup Corporation, a restaurant, other commercial space, and riverfront park, was factored into the risk-based cleanup activities.

Jane Miller (The Gallup Organization):

By taking an area that had the potential to be absolutely gorgeous but hadn't been for the last 50 years it's not only provided physical space, but it's actually helped people feel better about their own work space on a daily basis.

Roger Dixon (President/CEO, Metropolitan Entertainment and Convention Authority):

Well, I think you'll find that Qwest Center Omaha was basically the corner stone of over 2 billion dollars that was spent on the redevelopment of it. . . If it were not for Qwest Center Omaha, the Hilton would not be here. The once vibrant, and still vibrant Old Market area, which is kind of the entertainment area down town, is even more so now with all the people coming in to see the sporting events and the conventions and the concerts that we are doing here.

Hal Daub (Former Omaha Mayor):

It was all about keeping our young people here, and, by getting back to the magic of the river, we're going to do that.

Matt Noa (Omaha Resident):

I live in the tip top apartments, which is down town Omaha, which is just probably half a mile away from the riverfront, west of it. It's just across the parking lot from the quest center.

This is the original part of Omaha. This is where it all started, so it's like – being down here, you're in the middle of new things mixed with all the old, you know, traditional stuff. I just like the whole atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

Narrator Voice Over:

Casper. Atlanta. Omaha. Three very different communities turned their underutilized RCRA facilities into public assets.

They used collaboration and partnership to develop the revitalization vision and achieve decisions in a timely manner. They took advantage of risk based cleanup approaches. They made use of state cleanup programs. They used their revitalization vision to inform cleanup activities. They conducted cleanup and revitalization in phases, and they capitalized on recycling and materials reuse opportunities.

Stan Meiburg (USEPA, Region 4):

Confidence, cooperation, and flexibility are the real keys to success.

Karl Bourdeau (National Brownfields Association):

Well, a success is when the property has been cleaned up in a fashion that everyone is comfortable will provide protection, both in the short term and in the long term, and also with respect to redevelopment that its going to be of widespread beneficial use and value to not only the local community but to all those concerned in the redevelopment project.

Michael Pawlukiewicz (Director of Environment Policy & Education, Urban Land Institute):

For it to work well, everybody has to have a stake in it. If we are all really partners, I mean partners want each other to succeed. If you get that kind of a positive collaborative attitude, then you can have real outstanding, you know, success.

Jay Ringenberg (NE DEQ):

No matter how bad the site looks and what you think you have to do, it can be done.

The End

For more information go to www.epa.gov/rcrabrownfields