
SUMA Position Statement

Contaminated sites pose environmental and health risks to residents of hometowns across Saskatchewan. These sites, particularly orphaned and abandoned sites, also prevent the development of land located in prime commercial locations. SUMA calls on the provincial government to:

- Engage with municipal governments to develop options to clean up contaminated sites, such as legislative tools, and information and guidance on best practices.
- Impose a time frame mandating owners to clean up closed contaminated sites quickly.
- Ensure the Impacted Sites Fund is easily accessible and adequately funded to ensure municipalities can remediate abandoned or orphaned sites quickly and properly.

Key Messages

- Abandoned or orphaned contaminated sites pose environmental and health risks, have negative economic impacts, and are costly to remediate.
- Urban municipalities need legislative tools to incentivize or compel remediation of contaminated sites and information and resources on best practices.
- Mandated timelines will ensure that businesses have clear rules to follow and residents of hometowns are not left paying cleanup costs.
- While the provincial Impacted Sites Fund is welcomed, the fund needs to be easily accessible and adequately funded to ensure contaminated sites are cleaned up in a timely and appropriate manner.

Status

- SUMA adopted the Contaminated Sites Policy on November 30, 2018.

Background

Contaminated sites, brownfields, and impacted sites are properties that have been environmentally impacted. These sites pose public health risks and can have economic and environmental impacts on surrounding properties. Contaminants can leach into surrounding properties and groundwater. Sites can become overgrown nuisance properties that limit development opportunities. Property taxes may also be unpaid, or land values suppressed, and often a prime commercial location is left undeveloped and unused.

In many cases, hometowns lack the tools necessary to ensure immediate remediation of these lands or the funds to carry out cleanups where businesses fail. Municipalities are often forced to take on the liability, incurring costs to ensure the site can provide economic benefit to the community or allow an important municipal infrastructure project to proceed.

Often these sites are abandoned or orphaned. The cost barriers to re-establish a site can be significant, with no incentives or support to help get the land back into use.

An example is an orphaned gas station. When the business was operating at the corner of First Avenue and Main Street, leaks, spills, and general use led to hydrocarbon contamination of the soil. When the business closed, the owner declared bankruptcy. The prime commercial location was then left to

become overgrown, eventually falling to the hometown to fund cleanup of the pumps and storage tanks.

SUMA members have put forward several resolutions calling for more legislative tools and enforcement processes to encourage remediation of contaminated sites, including:

- Improving provincial legislation and enforcement processes related to contaminated properties (1997, City of Moose Jaw)
- Enacting stronger legislative protection for municipalities, and establishing industry funds to help cover the cost of cleaning up abandoned or orphan sites (2000, SUMA Board of Directors)
- Allowing municipalities to assess additional mill rate factors against properties that are contaminated and registered for monitoring by the Saskatchewan Ministry of the Environment (2007, Town of Rosetown)
- Enhancing *The Environmental Management Protection Act* to require owners of abandoned hydrocarbon sites to remediate outstanding contamination issues on abandoned sites and hold the property owners accountable for failure to comply (2009, City of Prince Albert)
- Strengthening municipal legislation to enable municipalities to pass bylaws regulating vacant dwellings and non-residential buildings (2014, City of Prince Albert)

Strategic Context

In 2014, the province released the [Environmental Code](#), which includes a [chapter on impacted sites](#). In 2015, the Ministry of Environment issued an [Impacted Sites Guidance Document](#) and created an Impacted Sites Fund for orphaned sites. The fund receives funding through certain fines and administrative penalties pursuant to *The Environmental Management and Protection Act, 2010*, gifts, donations, grants, or money appropriated by the Legislature.

Funding remediation works. In 2000, the province launched [the Orphaned Fuel Storage and Sales Facility Clean Up Program](#), which assessed 436 sites and cleaned up 103, and [the \\$6.5 million Centenary Fund to clean up large-scale contaminated sites](#).

While the Impacted Sites Fund is welcomed, it needs to be accessible for hometowns without unnecessary administrative burden. The fund also needs a level of funding which can ensure municipalities can clean up the property appropriately and quickly.

Saskatchewan hometowns also need the tools to incentivize remediation and enforcement processes to ensure compliance. These tools and processes can include:

- Reviewing municipal legislation (*The Cities Act, The Municipalities Act, and The Northern Municipalities Act, 2010*, and related regulations) to ensure hometowns have the tools to incentivize remediation, including multi-year cancellations reductions, or deferrals, or assess special levies to remedy and reclaim contaminated sites.
- Creating resources such as guidance documents tailored for municipalities to share best practices in cleaning up orphaned or abandoned contaminated sites.
- Imposing a time frame that mandates owners to clean up closed contaminated sites quickly.

Contaminated Sites

Despite these significant challenges, hometowns are taking a lead in cleaning up contaminated sites. Highlights of this work and resources available include:

- Federation of Canadian Municipalities resources, including [Brownfields Sector Funding](#), the [Leadership in Brownfield Renewal Program](#), and [Brownfield Roadmaps, including one for Saskatchewan](#);
- The City of Saskatoon's [Brownfield Renewal Strategy](#);
- The City of Regina's [Underutilized Land Study](#); and
- Articles in the [Urban Voice](#) on contaminated sites in the Summer 2018 issue and brownfield redevelopment in the Fall 2018 issue.

Contacts

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