



**Reuse of Brownfields Protects Water Quality**

The cleanup of brownfields is an important part of the Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) water quality improvement efforts in New York. Thus, we were pleased when, in October 2003, Governor George Pataki and the state legislature adopted a new brownfields clean-up program and appropriated \$30 million in needed resources for local communities to support clean-up work.

The term brownfields refers to any real property where redevelopment or reuse may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of petroleum or other pollutants, contaminants or hazardous waste. New York State's legacy as an industrial leader has unfortunately also led to the negative consequence of many sites that require cleanup. While much progress has occurred, still more work needs to be done.

We expect that the brownfields program will improve water quality in several ways. First, it will protect groundwater. Soils of brownfield sites often contain high concentrations of contaminants such as petroleum products and hazardous wastes. Removing these contaminants prevents them from being carried into groundwater by

rainfall and snowmelt. Capping brownfields with an impervious cover also prevents this leaching to groundwater.

In addition, encouraging the reuse of brownfield sites, rather than developing fields, forests or farms, helps preserve open space. Open space helps keep our waters clean and reduces flooding by acting as a filter and sponge for stormwater.

An added benefit of the brownfield program is that it requires the DEC to develop a comprehensive groundwater protection and remediation program and provides a funding source to do so. We are currently in the planning stages of the Brownfield and Groundwater Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Project. Its purpose is to build a user-friendly, comprehensive GIS database for the DEC that ultimately will be accessible to the interested public. Information about remedial site cleanups, soil and groundwater contamination, location and type of wells, and drinking water information such as Annual Water Quality Reports and data from the Source Water Assessment Program will be included.

Brownfield cleanup and reuse protects water quality for all New Yorkers. It also improves our quality of life, as blighted land returns to productive use and development pressure on existing open space is reduced. We look forward to seeing the results of this new program.

—Sandra L. Allen  
Director of the NYSDEC Division of Water

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than a hurricane.



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