

Contaminated Sites

Why is this important?

Contaminated sites can expose humans and other living things to toxics and health risks. The major types of contaminated sites designated by the State of California are Leaking Underground Fuel Tank (LUFTs) sites and Spills, Leaks, Investigations and Cleanups (SLIC) sites, which can include heavy industrial sites, dry cleaners, landfills, or sites of past toxic spills, among other things.

Protection of residents from toxic and industrial pollution was one of the early rationales for zoning laws, and while there is a growing realization of the benefits of mixing certain land uses, the evidence remains as strong as ever that contaminated or toxic sites should be isolated from areas where people live, work, and play. Many toxic or contaminated sites can be remediated, and often a re-development or re-use project can be an opportunity to do this.

Defining Sustainability

A sustainable state is one where the number of contaminated sites decreases to zero and no new cases of contamination occur.

Indicator Results

Total Contaminated Sites

The California State Water Resources Control Board maintains a list of contaminated sites. For San Mateo County, the local authority that monitors contaminated sites is the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board. A historical summary of contaminated sites in Redwood City is shown in Table 7, with salient points as follows:

- As of May 30, 2008, there were 83 contaminated sites in Redwood City undergoing investigation, monitoring, and/or cleanup.
- The majority of contaminated sites in Redwood City (54 of 83) are leaking underground fuel tank (LUFT) sites, and most of these are functioning or defunct gas stations, some near residential areas. The remainder of the contaminated sites (29 of 83) are state-designated Spills, Leaks, Investigations, and Clean-ups (SLIC) sites, and include several dry cleaners, a landfill, some contaminated construction and maintenance facilities, some heavy industrial sites, sites of past toxic spills, and miscellaneous other contaminated sites. Based on the contaminated site descriptions in the LUFT and SLIC databases, very few (or possibly none) of the contaminated sites appear to be residential, though the database list does not explicitly state land use designation, and some contaminated sites could be near residential uses.
- The number of contaminated sites in Redwood City decreased rapidly from 1998 to 2001; from 2001 to 2006 the number of sites was mostly stable, and from 2006 to 2008 there was another moderate reduction.

- The total number of contaminated sites in Redwood City has declined 31% from 1998 to 2008; the number of contaminated sites in San Mateo County as a whole decreased by 39% over the same period.
- Redwood City has a high total number of contaminated sites relative to other cities in San Mateo County; its 86 contaminated sites at the end of 2007 was second only to South San Francisco (96 sites), and was followed by the City of San Mateo (67 sites) and San Carlos (49 sites).

Table 7: Total Contaminated Sites in Redwood City and San Mateo County¹⁹

	12/31/98	12/31/99	12/31/00	12/31/01	12/31/02	12/31/03	12/31/04	12/31/05	12/31/06	12/31/07	5/30/08
Redwood City	120	113	96	91	89	88	91	90	91	86	83
San Mateo County	825	808	707	624	561	554	538	534	525	507	N/A

Source: San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board, 2008

Summary of Results

Redwood City has a high total number of contaminated sites relative to other San Mateo County cities, though it has fewer than it did in 1998. Current or former gas stations are the most common single type of contaminated site. Some contaminated sites offer opportunities for remediation and redevelopment.

Potential Policy Responses

- Only allow new drycleaners that are “green” (that use EPA-approved carbon dioxide or wet cleaning methods, not conventional perchloroethylene-based methods).
- Publicize and continue to participate in the County’s hazardous waste collection service, particularly focusing on industrial, commercial or construction sites known to use hazardous materials.
- Provide incentives for landowners to clean up and redevelop contaminated sites.

¹⁹ The location of LUFT and SLIC sites in Redwood City is included in a table in the “Sources and Methodology” Appendix.