



Superfund Redevelopment Program

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Publicker Industries One-Page Summary

Just months after a five-alarm fire and several explosions ravaged the abandoned Publicker Industries property located along the Delaware River in Philadelphia, EPA investigated what many people referred to as an environmental "time bomb." They found more than two million gallons of toxic wastes at this former distillery and chemical mixing and storage facility. It was enough to make it one of the worst uncontrolled hazardous waste sites in the Mid-Atlantic. EPA cleaned up the site which is now poised to become a "superport," with terminal facilities for both passengers and commercial goods. A \$250 million landmark redevelopment deal among EPA, the state, and developers may turn the old Publicker site into one of the best redevelopment sites in the mid-Atlantic.



The site occupies 42 acres of waterfront property along the western banks of the Delaware River, in the southeast portion of the city. From 1912 to 1985, Publicker Industries owned and operated a liquor and industrial alcohol distillation plant. When production slowed in the late 1970s, the company used its tanks to store chemicals and fuel oil for other companies. Production continued to decline and eventually Publicker ceased operations in February 1986 and sold the property to the Overland Corporation. In November 1986, after an explosion had killed two workers, Overland declared bankruptcy and abandoned the site. They left behind toxic chemicals and asbestos, contaminated structures, and hundreds of miles of pipes containing flammable substances.



In 1989, EPA added the site to its list of hazardous waste sites needing cleanup. EPA first removed explosive substances to reduce the immediate threats to people. The Agency then removed asbestos, demolished and removed contaminated buildings and debris, excavated contaminated soils and other debris for shipment to an off-site disposal facility, and closed and sealed groundwater wells.

Holt Cargo Systems, Inc., took an interest in the property and, with EPA and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, conducted a Prospective Purchaser Agreement allowing them to purchase the property for \$4 million. As part of the agreement, Delaware Avenue Enterprises, an affiliate of Holt, cleaned up the remaining contamination and prepared it for a \$250 million expansion of Holt's shipping facilities. In exchange for Holt's commitment to complete the remainder of the cleanup and redevelop the site, EPA exempted them from liability for existing contamination. Holt's plans include a 1,200-foot pier along the Delaware River to support warehouses, special port facilities, a container cargo dock, and the city's first dedicated passenger ship terminal. The "superport" is expected to create hundreds of jobs, and increase nearby residential property values and public revenue for the city of Philadelphia. Construction of the port is underway.

To learn more about the redevelopment or reuse of Superfund sites, write to reuse.info@epa.gov, or call the Superfund Hotline at 800-424-9346 or (703) 412-9810 (Washington, DC area), or Melissa Friedland at (703) 603-8864.

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