

Brownfields Success Story

Brownfield to Brewery: DNREC delivers a win-win in Delaware Wilmington Brew Works (Wilmington, DE)

The property was developed between 1914 and 1917 for the Delaware Chemical Engineering Company, owned by Francis Irene duPont for his use as an experimental chemical laboratory. In 1930, the site was transitioned to a research laboratory for the Darco Division of the Atlas Powder Co., which manufactured black powder and dynamite. In 1946, the complex was sold to Harry S. Thiel and wife, and approximately 5,000 square feet of secondary building space was added to the original plant. In 1983, the Thiels sold the property to their corporate entity, Harper-Thiel Electroplating Co., which continued limited business operations until the company closed in 2000. At that time, the land was sold to a developer, whose company entered the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) Voluntary Cleanup Program in 2001 to clean up the site. However, the property remained vacant and in disrepair until 2006, when DNREC initiated emergency interim actions to secure the site, remove contaminated surface and subsurface soils in the vicinity of old chrome plating tanks, and remove drums and other containers of hazardous chemicals and wastes that remained on the property after the business closed. In 2016, the property was sold to the current brownfields developers, Ralph and Rose Pepe.



Harper Thiel Inc. in Wilmington, DE before remediation

EPA Grant Recipient:
Delaware Department of
Natural Resources and
Environmental Control, and
City of Wilmington

Grant Types: Environmental
Assessment, and CERCLA
128(a) Funding

Former Uses: Chemical
Laboratory, Electroplating

Current Uses: Brewery,
restaurant, and office space

Road to Remediation and Reuse

The former Harper-Thiel site is located in Wilmington's Ninth Ward, an urban neighborhood near Interstate 95, and is partially surrounded by residential and light commercial properties. An active railroad right-of-way is located to the north. Haynes Park, a public park, is located across Miller Road to the south.

The heavily-contaminated, early 20th century facility was in complete disrepair with collapsed buildings, abandoned drums and other containers of hazardous wastes, and numerous areas of significant environmental concern. Primary contaminants of concern in the soil were hexavalent chromium, lead, and PCBs. Hexavalent chromium contamination was also detected in the groundwater.

The following materials listed below were properly characterized and transported to permitted disposal facilities in 2008:

- 3,700 tons of contaminated soil and hazardous waste;
- 19 tons of hazardous building debris
- 650 tons of non-hazardous construction debris; and
- Approx. 25,000 gallons of chromium-contaminated groundwater.

The site has been redeveloped for light commercial use and is occupied by Wilmington Brew Works, one of the first fully-operational breweries to open in Wilmington in over 60 years. A wood-fired pizza restaurant will occupy a portion of the main building, with office space planned for the remaining portions of the building.

Over \$3 million in state Hazardous Substance Cleanup Act funds has been expended in cleaning up the site, along with an additional \$42,039 in federal funding from US EPA Brownfields grants to assess the property, Wilmington Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) funding of approximately \$55,000 for maintenance and infrastructure installation, and an additional \$250,000 from UDAG as a low interest loan to the developer. Although the majority of the cleanup activities have been completed, ongoing operating and maintenance activities continue.



Excavated area prior to dewatering

“Brownfields giving rise to the craft beverage industry in Delaware has become a theme for the state both environmentally and economically,” said DNREC Secretary Shawn M. Garvin. “Redeveloping brownfields into breweries and craft distilleries has become a popular way of launching vibrant and sustainable new businesses in Delaware. DNREC supports these new enterprises with experienced staff ready to assist brownfield-to-business projects in getting off them the ground and in supporting their future operations. Not only does DNREC’s Brownfields Development Program provide funding assistance for streamlined and expedited cleanups, our Site Investigation and Restoration Section also helps new owners and operators of these sites moving forward with liability protection for former brownfield sites.”



Wilmington Brew Works, open for business

One-of-a-Kind Architecture

The project is unique in that the oldest building on the site has significant architectural interest, having been built in the Mission/Colonial Spanish Revival style in 1917 by a prominent architect, Robeson Lea Perot. It is the only example in Wilmington of an industrial building with this style. Great care has been taken in the redevelopment of the site to preserve the original building structure and architectural details.

In addition, the project is in Wilmington’s Ninth Ward, an urban neighborhood that will benefit tremendously from revitalization of the old industrial site. Adjacent businesses have already reported an increase in customers and the project continues to attract new business to the area.

Booming Brewery Business in Delaware

A number of brownfield sites in Delaware have been redeveloped for use as craft breweries and distilleries, as well as grain suppliers for the craft beverage industry. Brownfield sites are well suited for this market, as they are usually situated in former industrial areas with existing infrastructure. In addition, Delaware’s Brownfields Development Program provides funding for streamlined and expedited cleanups integrated into the redevelopment, as well as liability protection for the new owner and operator(s) of the site.

One of Delaware’s first brownfield sites, Cannery Village, a former canning operation, is the location of the enormously successful Dogfish Head Brewery in in the town of Milton. Another award-winning brewery, Iron Hill Brewery and Restaurant, along the Riverfront Wilmington, is also located on a brownfield site. So is the mead and cider works, Liquid Alchemy Beverages, based in Newport, Del. Brownfields and brewing have become a winning combination in Delaware, spurring economic development and job creation for sustainable economic growth.

For more information:
Visit the EPA Brownfields website at
www.epa.gov/brownfields