

HB 2968 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Economic Development and Trade

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Meeting Dates: 4/10, 4/12

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires Environmental Quality Commission to coordinate with Oregon Business Development Department and United States Environmental Protection agency to create a pilot program for voluntary removal and remediation of hazardous waste starting January 1, 2018. Specifies participants who successfully complete pilot program are released from liability for hazardous waste cleanup under specified state and federal laws. Requires pilot program to prioritize parties conducting removal or remediation actions for the purpose of developing property for affordable housing. Requires Department of Environmental Quality to report on the implementation of the pilot program to interim committees of the legislature related to the environment and natural resources by September 15, 2022. Repeals pilot program and reporting requirement January 2, 2023. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Number of brownfield sites in Oregon
- Infrastructure available at brownfield sites
- Pennsylvania's Act Two program

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

BACKGROUND:

A generally accepted definition of a brownfield is "a real property where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by actual or perceived environmental contamination." Contaminated properties may pose health risks, and even the perception of contamination may reduce the property's value. A current search of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality Environmental Cleanup Site Information database indicates there are 432 known current or former brownfields in Oregon, with thousands of additional sites catalogued in the DEQ Leaking Underground Storage Tank database. An October 2014 ECONorthwest report estimated that there are roughly 13,500 sites in Oregon with known or suspected contamination.

Brownfield cleanup projects typically have many steps to determine what, if any, cleanup is required. The initial steps can include an environmental site assessment and remedial investigations to determine if a hazardous release occurred and if so, to what extent. The next steps generally include a technical feasibility study to determine how to clean up the property using several balancing factors like effectiveness, long-term reliability, implementation risk, and reasonableness of cost. Finally, once the proposed remedy method is selected, cleanup begins. This can include soil or groundwater removal or treatment, engineering options like capping the site, or institutional controls like land use or deed restrictions.

House Bill 2968 would task the Environmental Quality Commission with creating a pilot program in which voluntary action by property owners to remediate or remove hazardous waste from their property would remove state and federal liability from that property owner. The measure further requires the Department of Environmental Quality report back to the environmental and natural resources interim committees by September 15, 2022 on the pilot program's implementation.