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Local leaders can transform contaminated properties in to economic and community assets

New report from Smart Growth America helps local leaders overcome barriers to address nation's blighted properties

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A new guide from Smart Growth America for town, city and county leaders outlines a new tool they can use to build the financial and political support needed to reclaim and redevelop the thousands of abandoned gas stations, auto body shops, and industrial facilities nationwide.

In discussing how to revitalize these properties, which are home to underground storage tanks* (USTs), the report takes aim at one of the primary reasons these types of properties remain vacant for so long: Many officials just don't know what to do with them.

"As demand for housing in neighborhoods near town and city centers increases, we have to find ways for local officials to better address the blighted properties that stand in the way of economic development and stronger communities," says Geoffrey Anderson, President and CEO of Smart Growth America.

The regulatory issues associated with vacant properties containing a UST, as well as the time and money involved in cleanup, often makes revitalization seem like more trouble than it is worth. These challenges are overshadowed, however, by UST sites' potential for neighborhood revitalization. These sites are frequently located along major roads or at intersections, making them uniquely suited for redevelopment.

"When a property is contaminated with an underground storage tank, it's that much more difficult for leaders, because the process becomes incredibly complex and overwhelming," Anderson says. "That's why we have this guide – it shows how area-wide planning is a critical tool communities can use to bring back economic vitality."

From Vacancy to Vibrancy provides an overview of the tools and strategies available to leaders who want to transform vacant properties with USTs into economic and community assets. The guide also includes information about state and federal brownfield program requirements, brownfield redevelopment financing strategies, and multi-site planning techniques. An annotated list of resources is included at the end for further exploration.

To download the report, visit <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/from-vacancy-to-vibrancy/>.

* A UST site is any property with one or more buried or partially buried tanks that have been used to store petroleum or other hazardous substances. When gas stations, auto

body shops, industrial facilities or other types of development close down, these tanks are often left behind. As they age, the tanks are prone to leakage, and can contaminate both soil and groundwater, posing a serious environmental threat.

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Smart Growth America is the only national organization dedicated to researching, advocating for and leading coalitions to bring smart growth practices to more communities nationwide. From providing more sidewalks to ensuring more homes are built near public transportation or that productive farms remain a part of our communities, smart growth helps make sure people across the nation can live in great neighborhoods. For additional information visit www.smartgrowthamerica.org.

Learn more about brownfields redevelopment issues across the country and stay involved in national issues. Join the National Brownfields Coalition at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/brownfields.