

Bangor Daily News - Brownfields Funds Critical to Mill Project

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<p>Cianbro Corp. of Pittsfield has invested millions into changing the former mill into the Eastern Manufacturing Facility</p>

BREWER, Maine - For more than a century, the former Eastern Fine Paper Co. and its predecessors made paper on the banks of the Penobscot River and over the decades deposited toxic levels of pollutants in the soil around the mill.

A half-buried hazardous waste dump, leaky oil tanks and other identified environmental dangers were found on the 41-acre industrial site when the mill closed in January 2004.

Those poisonous items probably would have scared most developers away — including Cianbro Corp., which has changed the former mill into a 500-employee module manufacturing facility — had it not been for the city's proactive work to attain cleanup funds from state and federal agencies.

"We saw the risk of taking on that brownfields site greatly diminished because of the participation and partnership with the EPA and the DEP," Parker Hadlock, Cianbro business development project manager, said Monday. "That was a big deal to us."

To acknowledge the city's years of hard work, David Lloyd, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency director of brownfields and land revitalization in Washington, D.C., is a guest speaker at Friday's grand opening celebration for Cianbro's Eastern Manufacturing Facility.

Bob Varney, EPA Region 1 regional administrator, also will be on hand.

"The EPA, the brownfields program, has been a huge part of this project," Tanya Pereira, Brewer economic specialist, said Monday. "We have received over \$2 million in funding."

Lloyd is expected to speak about "the magnitude of what redeveloping a brownfields site can do for a community," Pereira said.

Brownfields are abandoned, idled or underused industrial or commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by environmental contamination. The goal of the brownfields program is to make sure chemicals and other hazards are cleaned up so the facility does not pose a threat to the environment or nearby homes.

After the mill closed, the EPA, the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection and state DEP spent \$1.5 million to \$2 million on clearing out and cleaning up the mill as well as heating the facility after it closed to prevent the chemical-filled pipes from bursting.

In May 2005, the EPA issued Brewer a \$350,000 brownfields assessment grant. Then in 2006, it granted the city \$1 million in revolving loan funds. In 2007, South Brewer Redevelopment LLC, which was created to own the former mill and protect the city from liability, was awarded \$200,000 in EPA cleanup grants. And in April, the city was awarded a \$400,000 brownfields grant.

In addition to the brownfields funding, the city and SBR also acquired \$3.55 million in federal funds for the entrance and shoreline improvements, and two state grants, \$15,000 for planning and \$400,000 for cleanup and demolition.

"The funds that we received from the EPA and the state and other sources allow us to give the developers we talked to a certain amount of comfort" that they wouldn't have to supply the funds for the multimillion-dollar cleanup, Pereira said.

The South Brewer mill site's contamination "was by far the biggest obstacle we had, as it is with any mill site anywhere," D'arcy Main-Boyington, Brewer economic development director, has said.

Without the brownfields and other cleanup funding, it's possible the Cianbro project would not have occurred, Pereira said.

"Cianbro has said that was critical," she said.

Cianbro Corp. of Pittsfield has invested millions into changing the former mill into the Eastern Manufacturing Facility, which will construct building modules, or prefabricated and pre-wired building structures at the site.
