Brownfield Characterization

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Subsurface Imaging
Innovative Solutions
A Complete Picture

The Brownfield Challenge

The EPA estimates that there are nearly half a million brownfield sites within the United States located in industrial centers, business districts, and neighborhoods. These properties can contain contamination and hidden subsurface infrastructure from previous commercial or industrial usage.

Brownfield sites carry great uncertainty due to lack of information and documentation on their historical use. This poses challenges for redevelopment, requiring broad site assessment by stakeholders before remedial efforts can proceed. Typically, the greatest unknowns are associated with the subsurface, where contaminants can leach from historic disposal practices and spills, to unseen disipated infrastructure. These unknowns present a great challenge to revitalizing a brownfield site, inhibiting redevelopment potential.

Geophysical Groundwork

While geophysics has long been used for subsurface mapping, advancements in data acquisition and analysis techniques have expanded geophysical capabilities to include increasingly complex settings. In the early 2000s, geophysicists and engineers at hydroGEOPHYSICS began developing and applying cutting-edge geophysical methods for the characterization of complex industrial environments, including the Hanford, Savannah River, and Los Alamos Department of Energy (DOE) Nuclear Sites. These highly dynamic and hazardous sites required a host of geophysical methods to be layered together to create a holistic understanding of the subsurface infrastructure and contamination zones.

HGI's DOE experience led to the development of a suite of cooperative site characterization techniques that provide clarity in the critical steps of assessing and determining remediation strategies. These complementary geophysical methods offer a uniquely competent set of target recognition tools invaluable to industrial and brownfield site investigations. Our experience has shown that using any single characterization method may not capture the full spectrum of subsurface features defining a brownfield, which can contain a broad range of targets needing to be located. HGI's approach is to complete a site-specific survey design that balances geophysical detection and mapping goals with site logistics and project costs in order to maximize results.

Case Study
Hanford Tank Farm Subsurface Investigation

These figures demonstrate multiple geophysical methods used to characterize the subsurface infrastructure at a Hanford tank farm site. The image to the right shows magnetic and electromagnetic data layered together around the outside of the tank farm. Here the combined data delineate and reinforce the locations of subsurface structures. Below is an example of magnetic data inside the tank farm used to locate buried metallic structures around multiple tanks. Below and to the right is a GPR example of linear features (pipes) associated with a single tank at the Hanford site.

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