

Environmental Assessments: Blog Commonground Discusses Old Soap Factories

04/26/2018

The Environmental Due Diligence section of the blog *Commonground* addresses a variety of issues associated with environmental and/or due diligence assessments of improved and unimproved real properties.

A March 9th post poses a question regarding a property described as a “former soap manufacturing facility.”

The post describes the property as currently occupied by retail stores. However, it was apparently a soap manufacturing facility from the 1920’s to the 1970’s. The facility is stated to have used, at some point, five chemical tanks.

The post poses three questions. These include:

1. Is old soap manufacturing industry known to be environmentally dirty? If so, what would be the common contaminants found at soap factories?
2. Or is this property suspicious only because of presence of the chemical tanks? i.e. the industry itself is not dirty.
3. Or even these chemical tanks shouldn’t be a concern if the industry is known to be clean?

A response posted on May 23rd states:

I would think things like lye and other chemicals could be a concern? A quick search turned up this information:

The first step of manufacturing these detergents is the selection of raw materials. Raw materials are chosen according to the many criteria, including their human and environmental safety, cost, compatibility with other ingredients, and the form and performance characteristics of the finished products.

Amongst these different ingredients you can find:

- Sodium hypochlorite helping whiten, brighten and remove stains.
- Alkalis (ammonium sodium hydroxide). Alkalinity is useful in removing acidity, fatty and oil soils.
- Acids (nitric acid, acetic acid, hydrochloric acid, sulphonic acid) to neutralize or adjust alkalinity of other ingredients and because some specialty cleaners need extra acidity to remove mineral build up.

- Colouring agent (pigments or dyes).
- Solvents (ethanol, isopropanol, propylene glycol) to prevent separation or deterioration of ingredients in liquid products and dissolve organic soils.

[A link to the post can be found here.](#)