

Ajo Copper News

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Program to assess pollution on Ajo properties is announced

Tod Whitwer, managing member of Allwyn Environmental, talked at the recent meeting of the Western Pima County Community Council about a new program to assess ground contamination on commercial properties in the Ajo, Why, and Lukeville area. He pointed out that the program is separate from the Shaw Environmental effort to detect mine-related metals on commercial and residential properties in Ajo.

The Brownfield Grant program is designed to assist communities with the expense of assessing ground contamination and the costs of cleanup. The goal of the project is to stimulate redevelopment of abandoned or neglected properties. Whitwer explained that many commercial property owners do nothing with their defunct businesses because they fear exorbitant fees to clean up ground contamination, and potential buyers stay away because they don't want to be saddled with the cost. The first phase of a cleanup assessment alone can cost from \$2500 to \$5000, he said.

Under the Pima County Brownfield program, the initial cost of a contamination assessment is waived. It is hoped that offering a no-cost assessment to property owners will encourage them to sell their property either to a public or private entity for redevelopment.

Allwyn Environmental has been contracted by Pima County to prepare Brownfield grant applications for submission to the Environmental Protection Agency. The \$200,000 grant application for the Ajo, Why, and Lukeville area is similar to the one used in the unincorporated community of Flowing Wells in Pima County last year.

Public input is being sought, said Whitwer. His company is looking for ideas for some goals

for the program, such as whether properties should be turned into parks or open spaces or affordable housing. He said a public meeting will be scheduled in the near future.

There is a better chance of receiving the grant if a number of sites can be identified and lined up for assessment, according to Whitwer.

In a phone conversation, Daniel Tylutki, senior planner with Pima County Community Development & Neighborhood Conservation Department, said he would likely be attending the input meeting to do a PowerPoint presentation about the program. He said the assessments, which are required for transfer of ownership of commercial property, are done to industry standards and often, he opined, is enough to get a buyer interested in making a purchase. Initially the program is looking at doing about 18 phase one and 10 phase two assessments in the area, all at no cost to owners. The program website is www.pima.gov/CED/CDNC/Brownfield.htm online.

Two community organizations, the International Sonoran Desert Alliance and Why-Ajo-Lukeville Development have agreed to assist Pima County with the Brownfields program, should the grant be obtained. Cheryl Langer, president of WALD, explained that ISDA and WALD will promote community involvement, coordinate community meetings, and solicit input and feedback from the community throughout the process. As soon as a draft of the grant application is available, ISDA and WALD will host a community meeting to field comments or ideas for the grant. The community is also invited to identify any properties they think would benefit from this program. No assessments are done without the property owner's permission.