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County gains grant funds

Money will help find sites with contamination

By **STEPHEN TAIT**
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Newly armed with \$1 million in federal funding, St. Clair County officials plan to identify properties that might be contaminated.

Identifying the properties, officials said, will allow them to take advantage of money available to clean up hazardous materials and prepare land for future development.

"It is a big step," said Geoff Donaldson, senior planner with metropolitan planning said. "It is hard to go to the (state and federal government) for assistance to clean up sites if it is not identified in a plan."

Michigan's U.S. Sens. Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow announced the county's Brownfield Redevelopment Authority had received the money Tuesday. It's a chunk of \$10.6 million the Environmental Protection Agency gave to 19 Brownfield projects throughout the state.

St. Clair County is one of eight communities to receive \$1 million. Others received \$400,000 or \$200,000.

The county already has a list of Brownfield properties, but officials said there are many where contamination is likely, including an abandoned rubber manufacturing facility in Marysville, the old DTE plant in Marysville and numerous properties

that used to house dry cleaning businesses, which are notorious for leaving behind underground fuel storage tanks.

Donaldson, the staff administrator of the county's Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, said the St. Clair County Brownfield Redevelopment Coalition -- made up of representatives from the county, Port Huron, Port Huron Township, Marysville and the St. Clair County Landbank Authority -- applied for the grant money in October.

Bill Kauffman, executive director of metropolitan planning, said it often takes time for the EPA to notice a community. With money in hand to identify hazardous sites and create a plan for addressing them, it "makes it easier to open the next door to secure funding to clean up sites," he said.

The ultimate goal, Donaldson said, is to improve the economic condition of the county by creating property that can be built on.

"This is just an example of a larger effort to look at a regional strategy for economic growth," he said. "This is a piece of the puzzle that the county is looking at to promote growth and attract economic development to our county."

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