



## Why Remediate When You Can Mitigate

While assessing contaminated property with apparent elevated environmental risks, the question I often get is “How much is it going to cost to clean it up?” My response is often “Maybe nothing.” In these situations, property owners often believe that the presence of contamination, in any form, above regulatory exposure thresholds, requires removal or remediation in order to reduce or eliminate environmental exposure risks. However, there are other options available.

When dealing with property contaminants, owners often believe their options are limited to either a cleanup of the contaminant or walk away from the property. Given that remediation of a property is usually an expensive endeavor, a risk adverse prospective buyer will opt to terminate the purchase contract and walk away. However, there is a third reasonably affordable option that can effectively reduce or eliminate environmental exposure risks, specifically mitigation. Where remediation can eradicate the source of the contamination, mitigation can prevent the route of exposure from that contaminant, often implemented with little or no additional cost.

Mitigation of environmental risks can include a physical control at the property, or a property use restriction. Physical controls can include passive and active barriers or systems.

### **PASSIVE MITIGATION CONTROLS:**

- Use of pavement, building structures, membranes, clean soil/fill or fencing to isolate the contamination.

### **ACTIVE MITIGATION CONTROLS:**

- Ventilation of vapors beneath building.
- Use of a buildings heating and air-condition ventilation system to stop contaminants from entering buildings.

In most cases, mitigation controls are already present at the property or will be installed as a necessary infrastructure of the property. This adds little to no additional cost to the operation or redevelopment of the property, is quick to implement, and has less impact or disruption on the property. However, while often simple and straightforward, the ongoing operation and maintenance of some mitigation techniques require a certain level of risk tolerance, a factor property owners need to assess for themselves.

While considering the benefits of a mitigation technique or system for your project, there are three important questions that must be factored into the decision to move forward.

### **RISK TOLERANCE**

Risk tolerance is a measure of the level of risk person or organization is willing to accept, expressed in either qualitative or quantitative terms and used as a key criterion when making risk-based decisions. Proving to be risk tolerant could lead to mitigation, while risk adverse could lead to remediation. Personal risk tolerance is usually the widest ranging variable to consider.

### **SITE CONSTRAINTS**

Use of a mitigation technique or system can limit where buildings are located, where soils can be disturbed or excavated and/or the use of groundwater. The more flexibility there is with property use or redevelopment, the greater chance that mitigation techniques will provide the desired, cost-effective solution.

### **SITE USE**

While assessing a property, it is important to define the intended use of the property – residential, commercial or industrial. Regulatory environmental thresholds for residential properties are lower than commercial or industrial-use properties. The use or redevelopment of a contaminated property for commercial or industrial use is typically less burdensome than a residential-use property.

The use of mitigation versus remediation techniques to address environmental contamination can be the deciding factor of purchasing a viable property. While evaluating a contaminated property, do not automatically think that it will be expensive to make the property safe and productive to use, it might not cost you a dollar more. While there is often no straightforward answer of whether to remediate or mitigate, understanding the key variables will help determine the right choice for you.

**If you are deciding if remediation or mitigation is right for your property, let us help.  
Call WESTECH at 513.353.0700 or email Mike Westerfield at [mwesterfield@gowestech.com](mailto:mwesterfield@gowestech.com).**

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### **About WESTECH**

WESTECH Environmental Solutions is an environmental consulting firm focusing on the assessment and management of contamination and environmental hazards at properties. As environmental consultants, we offer an integrated set of services to clients purchasing, managing and redeveloping properties. With WESTECH, we strive to provide the balance between minimizing your environmental liabilities and minimizing your costs to do so.