



Spotlight on DTSC

Former plant site could become showcase development

Recycling is big these days. People recycle cans. They recycle electronics. Paper is shredded and turned into more newspaper.

That's happening with land too. Marginal or unproductive parcels throughout the state are being turned into [open space](#), [housing tracts](#), [business parks](#) and other uses that benefit communities. These are called Brownfield sites, and reclaiming them is a primary mission of the California [Department of Toxic Substances Control](#). It's evident in places such as Contra Costa County, where the state agency is leading the rebirth of the former DuPont Antioch Works property (currently known as DuPont Oakley), a former chemical manufacturing plant site along the banks of the San Joaquin River in Oakley, population 35,000.

About 150 acres is considered ultimately developable, and DTSC is accepting public comment on a proposal to make 27 acres of them available for unrestricted use. If approved, it would bring to 75 acres the amount of land that, according to DuPont, is currently available for reuse. Those 75 acres include 22 that are set aside for a proposed power plant by [Radback Energy Inc.](#) that would generate power for more than 500,000 households – and provide 700 construction jobs, according to the [Contra Costa Times](#).

“Once the 27 acres are released for unrestricted use, they are no longer subject to DTSC oversight for cleanup activities. DuPont is generally free to do whatever it wants with them (27 acres),” said Peter Ruttan, DTSC’s project manager. “They could sell the 27 acres or choose to develop them for whatever land use the city of Oakley deems appropriate for the area.”

Revitalizing the 27 acres and then ultimately all 150 acres could be a game changer for Oakley. DuPont bought about 552 acres in 1955, and operated a plant for more than four decades. Much of the 552 acres was never part of the chemical plant, and has remained mostly agriculture land and wetland habitat. The Oakley site has been rebranded [Big Break Oakley](#), and is being marketed nationally and internationally by a consultant to DuPont.

The 150 acres – which are near two freeways and a deep-water marina, is connected to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe rail line and has access to utilities and fiber optics - is considered prime real estate. In fact, it is designated as one of Oakley’s three primary development areas and a potential employment center.



DEPARTMENT of TOXIC SUBSTANCES CONTROL

Elaine Richardson, vice president of DuPont’s redevelopment consulting firm, says the property is unique in large part because it is large, flat and contiguous. “They don’t make them like this anymore. It is a superb site,” said Richardson, who is with [Vita Nuova LLC](#), a company that specializes in bringing brownfields back to life.

DuPont made chlorofluorocarbons, fuel additives, and white pigments used in food and other products, and employed nearly 600 people at its peak.

Manufacturing ceased in 1998, and most of the buildings were demolished a year later, except for a small portion that is used for testing automotive paint. Contaminants were detected on portions of the site, and are being removed in a systemic cleanup that has spanned many years – and uses Eucalyptus trees and willows to help soak up contaminants through their roots, and iron fillings to draw out other pollutants.

“The most likely use is a business park or light industrial,” Kenneth Strelo, the city’s senior planner.

Economic development officials estimate a business park would generate about 87 jobs per acre, and a light industrial project would provide about 22 jobs per acre. Ultimately, hundreds of people could once again work on the site, although their tasks would be different than when DuPont ran it.

DTSC will continue to provide direction for cleanup efforts for the rest of the DuPont Oakley site. When cleanup is complete and the whole DuPont Oakley site is ready for redevelopment, the community could have a showcase project.



Artist’s rendering of Oakley Generating Station by Radback Energy