

City of Vancouver Archives: Contaminated Sites and Preliminary Site Assessments.

UBC Geography 419: Research in Environmental Geography.
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By now you are quite proficient with many online databases, but of course not all information can be accessed via the internet. At the City of Vancouver archives, you will be introduced to some tools that can provide insight into historic land uses. Often this information is desired by people who wish to protect themselves against inheriting somebody else's toxic hazards. Individuals considering purchasing or developing a property, or lending money to a business, want to make sure that there are no hidden 'surprises' buried beneath the soil or leaching through the grass from a neighbouring parcel of land. These individuals do not want to be liable for the cost of cleaning up a mess created by others.

In these instances, a preliminary site investigation profile is compiled from readily available sources, including past and present uses. Interviews are also conducted with people who have been involved with the site, including neighbours. This 'due diligence' records search protects an individual from future claims against them. If the initial search turns up cause for concern, then physical testing of the site may be necessary.

After our tour of the archives, your job is to make use of the city directories, fire insurance maps and other sources to construct a site-use history. If you live in Vancouver, feel free to use your home address. If you live outside of Vancouver, you may wish to research the former Expo lands on False Creek, the area underneath the Oak Street Bridge, the intersection of 18th and Dunbar, the intersection of 6th and Cambie, 9250 Oak Street or 41st and Collingwood.

What activities took place on and around your site over time? Might they have produced any causes for concern?

Should you so wish, when you return to UBC visit the GIC and look at the sequence of air photos for your address. Do they confirm the information you have already collected? Do they tell you anything new, not found in your archival sources?