



DEC Brownfields Program

November 2023

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Spill Prevention and Response
Contaminated Sites Program

CASE STUDY: Polaris Hotel, Fairbanks

The Polaris Hotel, Fairbanks' tallest building, was built in 1952 with an annex constructed in 1973. Originally an apartment building, it was converted to a hotel until it closed in 2001 following a significant flooding event. The building was abandoned in 2002 and the City of Fairbanks (COF) foreclosed on the property over unpaid taxes. Since then, the building experienced significant vandalism and structural damage. Health, safety, and environmental concerns were raised given the age and deteriorated state of the building.

In 2017, the COF received a Targeted Brownfield Assessment grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to conduct widespread testing for asbestos-containing materials (ACM), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB), lead, and other metals. Several contaminants were confirmed throughout the building, but additional testing was needed to delineate the extent of contamination.

Beginning in 2020, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) provided the City a number DEC Brownfields Assessment and Cleanup (DBAC) services, including additional assessment activities, a hazardous building materials (HBM) survey, a Health and Safety Evaluation, universal waste disposal, a data gap analysis, and cleanup planning. Testing was conducted in the summer of 2021 and confirmed the presence of asbestos, mold, mercury, PCBs, and lead that would inhibit the reuse of the building. The COF concluded contaminant removal and demolition was the only viable option. Due to disposal regulations, however, all PCB-contaminated materials would have to be shipped out of state for disposal, which significantly increased project costs.

Work provided by DEC through the DBAC program directly assisted Fairbanks in securing \$10 million in appropriations to the EPA to oversee the demolition and disposal of the building. In the summer for 2023, the City began building demolition and the safe removal of contaminants. Once cleaned up is complete, the City plan to redevelop the property into a multi-use building containing shops, apartments, and other office spaces to enhance downtown Fairbanks while encouraging economic growth for the city.

Highlights

- Tallest building in Fairbanks used as apartments and a hotel for 50 years.
- Awarded an EPA Targeted Brownfield Assessment (2017), and DBAC services (2020, 2022)
- DBAC services included assessment activities, a hazardous building materials (HBM) survey, Health and Safety Evaluation, universal waste disposal, data gap analysis, and cleanup planning.
- DBAC services helped secure \$10 million in appropriations to complete the demolition in 2022
- Site to become multi-use city center building with stores and apartments

See the [Contaminated Sites Database](#), [File No. 102.38.206](#) for more information

"The DEC grant provided the basis and foundational understanding of the Polaris contamination problem. With data gathered using that funding, we were able to write a Work Plan that eventually was approved by the EPA and resulted in obtaining the complete funding to deconstruct the building that has become a dangerous blight on the city of Fairbanks."

- Robert Pristash, City of Fairbanks

