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From blight to bright

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Former industrial sites can present many challenges for redevelopment, especially sites that are contaminated and have Activity and Use Limitations. One option for utilization of large, contaminated sites is redevelopment as a solar farm. The Northeast Utilities Service Co. and its Mass. subsidiary the Western Mass. Electric Co. (WMECo) have had recent success redeveloping former hazardous waste and Brownfield sites into energy-producing solar farms, including a former industrial site in Springfield, Mass. that is now one of the largest operating solar facilities in New England.

The 12-acre solar farm sits on what was originally the site of the Chapman Valve manufacturing facility in the Indian Orchard neighborhood of Springfield. The facility had been abandoned since 1997 and was in derelict condition. As part of sponsored Brownfield activities, the city of Springfield conducted asbestos and hazardous materials abatement, underground storage tank removal, and soil remediation at the site. Considering the resulting concerns over the potential for vandalism of and accidents in the abandoned building, and public liability concerns, along with the desire to potentially redevelop the property for commercial/light industrial use, the city and the Springfield Redevelopment Authority secured funding to demolish the building and re-secure the site.

WMECo worked with the city and the Springfield Redevelopment Authority to turn the vacant and abandoned site into a solar farm with 8,200 installed solar photovoltaic (PV) panels that produce 2.3 megawatts (MW) of electricity -- enough to power more than 500 homes in the western Mass. region. The project brought nearly \$12 million of new construction to the region, with the site now generating \$400,000 in annual property tax revenues for the city.

This solar facility, combined with WMECo's previously constructed 1.8 MW solar facility in Pittsfield, Mass., contributes to the utility's renewable energy goals, and the Commonwealth's goal to install 250 megawatts of solar energy by 2017.

Though the redevelopment of contaminated sites can present many challenges and permitting hurdles, WMECo's success shows that solar energy can be considered a viable option for the redevelopment of compromised sites.

The EBC is having a program on Renewable Energy at Closed Landfills on July 26th at the Boxborough Holiday Inn. For more details and to register, please visit the EBC website at www.ebcne.org

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