

# Officials to tour Indian River County's potentially polluted sites

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GIFFORD — More than 30 years after Indian River County bought the community's utility system, longtime resident Victor Hart Sr. said Wednesday he still has questions lingering about the former Urban Development Utilities sewage plant on 47th Street.

The company built the plant in 1970 and ran it until the county bought it in 1977, records show. And in that time, Hart said, there were reports of sewage spills.

"I want to find out if anything is down there (under the soil)," he said.

And Thursday he will be joining a busload of other community leaders and officials on a visit to six Gifford locations that residents say might harbor pollution and be worthy of redevelopment as "brownfields."

Greg Vaday, economic development coordinator with the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, said he has applied to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for a \$200,000 grant to assess another location, the former South Gifford Road Landfill, and a \$400,000 grant to address overall Gifford among various Treasure Coast communities.

The EPA started its Brownfields Program in 1995 to identify, clean up and manage an estimated 450,000 contaminated sites across the country, agency records show.

Vaday said brownfield status brings various incentives to the community, such as tax breaks for voluntary cleanup and the creation of new jobs once the land is redeveloped. He said he should know in March if he gets the grants.

Nandra Weeks, president of the Florida Brownfield Association, has said pollution, whether actual or perceived, tends to prevent owners of such lands from being able to reuse them.

So the program helps land owners and communities find new uses based on how badly a parcel was polluted and whether it can be cleaned.

Vaday said the tour will show him sites, such as the old sewage plant, that could merit treatment as a brownfield.

Julianne Price, with the county Environmental Health Division, is calling it the “Toxic Treasure Tour.”

She said she is concerned with some of the salvage yards that line the canal on 45th Street, even though they have been there since before the county’s zoning and stormwater-management laws.

“We’re told they are ‘grandfathered,’ but you can see pipes leading out into the canal,” Price said. “What are they draining?”

### Toxic Treasures

Julianne Price, an Indian River County environmental health specialist, is taking other community leaders on a tour of various possible pollution sites in Gifford to see if they might qualify for federal redevelopment grants. The sites are:

Former Gifford sewage-treatment plant

Smith’s Grocery and Julia Brown’s old gas station on 45th Street

Former South Gifford Road Landfill

Grandfathered salvage yards along 45th Street

The 45th Street canal for pollution observation

Proposed Prestige AB Ready Mix Concrete plant