Article Side
The Importance of Environmental Site Assessment before Buying a Property by Melisa Soluri

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Environmental issues can sometimes become very complex. When checking for environmental considerations, as inspectors for commercial real estate do, many lawyers recommend their clients to conduct a phase I environmental site assessment before anything else. During a phase I environmental assessment, an environmental expert will do thorough inspections to spot existing environmental problems.

During a phase 1 environmental assessment, environmental experts review geologic maps, country maps, topographic maps, Sanborn maps, as well as contact several state environmental professionals familiar with the surrounding area. This is done to find out about any nearby dangerous sites, and soil and groundwater conditions, among others. An assessment will ultimately determine whether or not the property has existing or potential environmental challenges.

After the phase I environmental assessment, a report is handed over to the environmental experts. If some potential issues are reported, the buyer can back out or, if he or she would persist, may request a phase II environmental assessment. During a phase II environmental assessment, groundwater and soil samples are taken and tested to see if the environmental contaminants are under regulatory or extreme levels.

However, an environmental site assessment is not the only determinant to buying a property. Common sense prevails at any time. If there is one thing that makes you dislike a property, walk away. Look at some topographic maps yourself and check if there are any nearby waste dumps. In fact, you can even drive by yourself and look if there are obvious signs of contamination.

Besides contamination, another big problem in real estate is flooding. Despite the governmentâ€™s mandate to disallow any home construction on flood plains, these things change every fifty to a hundred years. If real torrential rain occurs, anything can happen. Besides getting phase 1 environmental site assessment, check for some dark staining on homes and buildings that appear to cut off at the same place. The same goes for debris on trees and large plants. Look for dry and cracked soils, usually this means that the soil has been through a lot of wet and dry cycles, a sign that the surface undergoes constant periods of flooding.

Other things you have to look out for are inauspicious soil conditions, heavy rail traffic, extreme slopes, steep cliffs, areas prone to earthquakes, and the like. These are important checkpoints before purchasing property, especially if the site is to be developed into a commercial establishment. The general public becomes your responsibility when you develop a public place. For these reasons, an environmental site assessment is your first consideration before purchase. For more information on environmental site assessment, as well as due diligence real estate, visit nrep.org.

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Melisa Soluri - About Author:
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