

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



# Sites in Reuse

## General Mills/Henkel Corporation Superfund Site

2010 East Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414



*From left to right: Office space at the site being used as an art gallery; sign for East Hennepin Center for Small Business; office space at the old GM Research Laboratory.*

**Site size:** 6.5 acres

**Site Reuses:** Over 130 small businesses currently operate at the site, which has been transformed into a business incubator that supports the start-up and growth of local small businesses.



### INTRODUCTION

General Mills (GM) operated a technical research facility at the site for nearly 50 years on East Hennepin Avenue in an industrial area of Minneapolis. Today, the cleaned up former Superfund site serves as a home to over 130 different small businesses.

### SITE HISTORY

From 1930 until 1977, General Mills conducted technical research on a 10-acre property on three city blocks in Minneapolis. GM conducted primarily food research until 1947, when the company began chemical research operations in addition to food research. From 1947 until 1962, GM dumped an estimated 1,000 gallons of laboratory solvent wastes annually into a soil absorption pit. The pit included a series of three stacked, perforated 55-gallon drums buried at a depth of 10 to 12 feet. GM investigated the soil absorption pit in 1981, and reported to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) that the site pit and underlying ground water were contaminated with volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) and several other byproducts of food and chemical research processes. In 1980, GM sold the site to Henkel Corporation. The site was listed on the National Priorities List in 1984, and cleanup began in 1985, at which point Henkel Corp. ceased operations.

### THE CLEANUP PROCESS

MPCA oversaw the cleanup process, which was performed and funded by GM. The drums and piping associated with the absorption pit had been removed in 1981, soon after GM's initial investigation, leaving the ground water to be cleaned up. Six ground water pumpout wells were installed in 1985, and additional containment wells were added in the following years. GM analyzed a number of methods for removing the ground water contamination, and the state approved a system that extracts the ground water, treats it, and discharges clean water into the city's storm sewer system. This ground water remediation system was designed to prevent further migration of contaminants in the aquifers. The Henkel Corp. also performed asbestos abatement at the site. All construction at the site is now complete, and the contaminants in the ground water have stabilized. Long-term ground water monitoring is ongoing to ensure that the site's remedy is protective of human health and the environment. The MPCA has removed all restrictions on the site, except for land use restrictions on a small corner in the southeastern portion of the site where the disposal pit was located.

### THE REUSE PROCESS

After contamination at the site was removed and the ground water treatment system had been installed, the site was clean

enough to reuse. However, according to Larry Holmstad of B.B.D. Holdings Inc., the site was still stigmatized by its former Superfund status. “Anything associated with Superfund at the time was like black death,” he said. The site went on the market and received no inquiries for purchase during a five year period. Henkel Corp. wanted to sell the site in order to relieve the company of the financial burden of paying for and policing the site. In the summer of 1990, the site went up for auction. Larry Holmstad purchased it and found himself trying to figure out what to do with his newly acquired cleaned up Superfund site.

### **THE EAST HENNEPIN CENTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS**

Holmstad said the MPCA advised him to tear down the existing structures, a few large, interconnected buildings with several different sized offices. Instead, Holmstad recognized the potential to use the buildings and offices as the homes for many small businesses. In particular, the existing infrastructure at the site was attractive to Holmstad. Because of the nature of the work that GM had conducted in the laboratories, the site had tremendous pre-existing electrical infrastructure. Holmstad felt that the site was ideal for small businesses, and offered the existing heavy-duty industrial infrastructure as an amenity. Since then, the site has slowly filled up with small businesses, which vary in size and type from a one-man bicycle repair shop to a major coffee distribution headquarters for B&W Specialty Coffee Company B.B.D. Holdings also offers incentives for small businesses to use the site, such as reasonable rental rates for office spaces, 24-hour access to offices, and management and maintenance services. The location of the site also provides a central location in the heart of Minneapolis, easy access to highways, and ample parking.

According to Holmstad, tenants have showed little reluctance to move into a former Superfund site. In fact, some of the original tenants from the site’s first year in reuse still remain on the site today. Government agencies have even expressed interest in relocating to the site. B.B.D. Holdings advertises the site as a business enterprise development program, or “business incubator,” which supports the creation and growth of small businesses, particularly during the critical start-up period when they are most vulnerable. B.B.D. Holdings refurbished the 15 buildings on the property and converted them to offices,



*The office for a graphic design business*

commercial space, and research and laboratory facilities. Holmstad said simply making spaces at the site available to rent is important to small businesses owners. “Small businesses that have any chance of surviving don’t need charity, they need a place to work,” he said.

Holmstad applauds GM’s environmental monitoring and its strong support of reuse at the site. He feels that GM has been accommodating to B.B.D. Holdings and seems content with the direction the site has taken. Holmstad says the reuse process was a smooth one once he decided on how to use the site. He cites his own ignorance about Superfund and the site’s history of environmental problems as the only obstacles during the reuse process, but said his own ignorance may have also been his “saving grace.” Luckily for small businesses in Minneapolis, Holmstad’s “saving grace” resulted in a place that small businesses can call home and continue their day-to-day operations in an environment that is clean and supports their needs.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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