

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### ***Contacts:***

1. La Donna Thomas, US Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9, (415) 972-3375, fax (415) 947-3533
2. Jerry Orlando, Technical Assistance to Brownfields Communities, (503) 296-4812, fax (541) 737-2735
3. Erwin Washington, Lula Washington Dance Theatre, (323) 292-5852  
Fax: 323-292-5851

## **Crenshaw Neighborhood “Brownfield” Enters Final Phase of Cleanup**

In April, regulators with the Los Angeles Fire Department and the United States Environmental Protection Agency approved a plan to remove potentially harmful petroleum vapors from beneath the parking area of the Lula Washington Dance Theatre at 3773 Crenshaw Avenue using an innovative, cost-saving environmental cleanup technology. The technology uses strong suction to draw the vapors up through wells drilled directly into the petroleum-containing soil. The vapors are then sent through air pollution control equipment that operates similarly to the catalytic converters used to control pollution from automobiles. Using this technology will bring the cost of the cleanup to about one-third the cost of the conventional cleanup method, digging up and disposing of the soil off-site, which can increase the chances of human exposure to contamination. When the cleanup system begins operation in late July it will mark the beginning of the final phase of the site’s cleanup. The system is expected to operate for approximately one year.

When Lula and Erwin Washington bought the property in 2001 as the new home for their dance studios and theatre, they were aware of its status as a brownfield. “Brownfield” is the name given to abandoned, idled, or underused industrial or commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination. The USEPA estimates there are over 450,000 such properties throughout the United States. Historically, brownfields are unattractive for purchase and redevelopment due to liability and cleanup cost concerns and can remain idle for years. Redeveloping brownfields can increase the tax base, create jobs and improve the health and well being of a community.

The property’s past use as an ambulance repair facility left behind drums of hazardous material and the hydraulic equipment used in auto repair facilities. Leaking fuel storage tanks along the parking area had contaminated the soil underneath. When the Washingtons acquired the building, they voluntarily began working with an advisory committee of individuals from the city of Los Angeles and the EPA to clean up the property. “The assistance they provided was invaluable to me. Our project is only moving forward because the advisory committee has held my hand and really guided the process”, says Mr. Washington, referring to the team of experts that included Noemi Emeric, EPA Region 9 (then with the city of Los Angeles Brownfields Program), Patrick Wilson and Matthew Small, EPA Region 9, and Dan Weissman, City of Los Angeles

Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). Greg Lovato and Maxine Leitner, no longer with the City, also provided assistance to the project.

The City's Brownfields Program and the CRA paid for the removal of the hydraulics and the drums of hazardous material. A study of the soil containing fuel beneath the parking lot showed there to be some health risks over a long time period from vapors entering the building through the foundation. To fund the cleanup of the soil, Mr. Washington in 2003 applied for and received a \$200,000 Brownfields Cleanup grant from the EPA. Says Mr. Washington, "I wanted to do a good job of cleaning up the soil because I care about the safety of my patrons, staff, and the environmental health of the community."

To design and implement the soil cleanup system, the Washingtons retained the services of The Reynolds Group, a Los Angeles-based engineering firm headed by Ed Reynolds, a USC professor. Patrick Ewing, Project Manager for the cleanup, is a resident of the Crenshaw community and lives near the Theatre. Ken Green of the SCS Engineers environmental consulting firm provided technical oversight of the project for the City of Los Angeles.

A presentation on the project is planned for the June 8<sup>th</sup> Crenshaw Community Advisory Committee meeting at the Department of Water and Power building at the corner of Crenshaw and King Boulevards. The meeting is open to the public. Documents and information about the project can also be viewed at the Dance Theatre offices.

*For more information about this project see the contacts listed at the beginning of this press release.*