

Information on the Standard Practice for Environmental Site Assessments (ESA) 2016

What is a Phase I ESA?

The Phase I ESA involves a review of records, a site inspection, and interviews with owners, occupants, neighbors and local government officials. While sampling and laboratory analysis are not always included in this phase, they are conducted by an environmental professional trained in the appropriate standards (Table below). The review of government records and interviews may take a lot of time. To ensure a quality assessment, allow sufficient time for the process.

Contamination can result from activities that took place on the site. Contamination could also come from activities at a nearby property. The records and interviews will be the best sources to provide this information. Public records are available regarding the locations of properties that are classified as contaminated by federal or state regulations. Depending on their proximity to your site, contamination could have made its way to your site.

What is a Phase II ESA?

If a Phase I ESA identifies potential contamination of the site by hazardous materials, a Phase II ESA may be conducted. The Phase II ESA includes sampling and laboratory analysis to confirm the presence of hazardous materials. Some of the tests that may be performed include:

- surficial soil and water samples
- subsurface soil borings
- groundwater monitoring well installation, sampling, and analysis (may be appropriate on neighboring properties as well to determine the presence of contamination)
- drum sampling (if any were located on the property)
- sampling of dry wells, floor drains and catch basins
- transformer/capacitor sampling for Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)
- geophysical testing for buried tanks and drums
- testing of underground storage tanks

Depending on the results of the samples, the Phase II ESA should outline additional site investigation needs, and potential remedial actions that may be required to clean up the property.

How to Use the ESA Results

You know if your site is contaminated. What should be done to clean it up? Use the information resulting from your Phase I and II ESAs in your purchase agreement. Possible options might be:

- require that the current landowner clean up the property prior to the sale.
- reduce the cost of the property commensurate with the cost of remediation required.
- pursue acquisition and clean up alternatives that help control your environmental liability for the property.

Keep in mind the question “How clean is clean?” when working out the details. You, working with the DNR, not the seller, should establish the cleanup standards based on the NR 700 regulations and your needs. An experienced environmental professional performing the ESAs can help you by proposing the most up-to-date remedial methods and providing reasonable cost estimates. All details about who pays for cleanup costs and criteria for “how clean is clean” should be included in your final contract with the seller.

ASTM Standards for Conducting Environmental Site Assessments		
ESA type	ASTM standards	Other requirements
Phase I	E 1527-13 E 2247-08	AAI in 40 CFR 312; ISO 14015
Phase II	E 1903-11	