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SCS forms team for brownfield cleanup

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The environmental engineering firm SCS Engineers has formed a new team for dealing with contaminated sites, or brownfields, and making them into projects that are not only useful, but transformative.

Dan Johnson, an SCS vice president and project director, is joined on the team by Keith Etchells, a certified geologist and hydrogeologist; Alissa Barrow, a project manager and professional engineer; and marketing specialist Dana Justice. All are based out of the firm's San Diego office.

Other members of the SCS team include Jim Ritchie, an SCS vice president based in the Bay Area with three decades of experience in site restoration, and Ashley Hutchens, a vice president and environmental services director who is based in Long Beach.

The team of specialists will help clients secure newly available state grants for the remediation of brownfields and assist with environmental investigations and cleanup of the sites for development.

The grants, called Equitable Community Revitalization Grants (ECRG), are intended to fund the redevelopment of eligible projects in disadvantaged and vulnerable communities and promote affordable housing, community uses, revitalization, and equitable recycling of land.

They are administered through the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), which allocates approximately \$500 million for grants to municipalities, government agencies, tribes, nonprofits, and affordable housing ventures.

For the ECRG grant, a pre-qualification application round begins later this fall, with the application period open between six and eight weeks.

DTSC plans to launch the full ECRG application in the spring of 2022.

The funding spans use over four years.

The state also is providing \$200 million in grants for community-wide assessments, environmental investigations, and cleanups as well.

Johnson said the state offers more for this type of funding than the federal government provides for the entire country.

"The federal money doesn't go very far," he said.

Ritchie added in a statement that the skill sets from SCS's newly formed team "will give our clients a streamlined approach and create efficiencies that can give them a significant competitive advantage."

Johnson has been involved in many projects, including handling the environmental assessment and the necessary cleanup for the 26-block East Village Redevelopment Area, including Petco Park.

"Petco was a notable example of a brownfield site," he said.

The East Village Redevelopment Area, like much of downtown San Diego, was contaminated with everything from asbestos to fuels leaking from underground storage tanks.

"These sites are all around us," Johnson said.

East Village was environmentally impaired from commercial and industrial uses dating back to the late 1800s. Johnson, as the project director, was responsible for examining and remediating not only the 25 blocks, but he was tasked with a 35-block area-wide Phase I environmental site assessment (ESA), completing subsurface investigations, and implementing remediation activities for soil and groundwater contamination.

Once the extent of the problem was determined, SCS completed more than \$4 million in remediation work to clean up the blocks.

Johnson managed staff and resources in addition to budget authority. He was responsible for coordinating efforts between the client and stakeholders, and for serving as regulatory agency liaison.

Johnson said there are no shortage of cleanup success stories.

For example, while it took a long time to clean up the former Qualcomm Stadium site in Mission Valley, which was significantly contaminated following the leakage of gasoline storage tanks, "Kinder Morgan did a remarkable job cleaning up that site," he said.

San Diego State University is currently transforming the property into a mixed-use development with class buildings, housing, retail and park space.

Along with Phase I assessments, SCS Engineers handles Phase II examinations that include subsurface investigations of vados (the zone between the surface and the ground water table).

The problem of brownfields also presents an enormous opportunity, according to Johnson.

He said there are approximately 200,000 sites in the state, and physically contaminated sites aren't the only sites that may be redeveloped into higher quality uses.

Johnson has been part of more than 1,000 assessments, and roughly 75 site closures.

Johnson, who is on the San Diego Regional Quality Control Board, said grayfields are part of the picture as well.

"Grayfields are economically underutilized properties, such as some strip centers," he said. "A grayfield is where the future use has been negatively affected, whether it is real or perceived. The state's looking for sites that are in disadvantaged areas and are of high benefit, with a particularly high priority for affordable housing."

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