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## Asbestos Online Notification System Eliminates Delays in Demolition and Renovation Projects

The fight to end blight in Detroit and other cities in Michigan is on. \$100 million in federal funds are available for demolishing abandoned buildings, which in turn, should increase property values and decrease crime. The money will be distributed by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority which should lead to about 7,000 homes demolished in Detroit, Flint, Pontiac, Saginaw and Grand Rapids.

As the demolitions are on a fast track, it is imperative that the issuance of permits and approvals from regulatory agencies proceed in a timely manner. With most urban demolition projects, asbestos removal prior to demolition is a key step. Asbestos was widely used in buildings for fireproofing, thermal and acoustical insulation, condensation control, and decoration before it was identified as a dangerous carcinogen. The demolition and renovation of buildings has the potential to release asbestos fibers into the air.

The Department of Environmental Quality, Air Quality Division (DEQ/AQD) administers a federal program which specifies work practices for contractors to protect the general public from asbestos exposures, providing advanced notification to ensure that all protective measures are being taken to minimize asbestos emissions.

In the past, notifications either had to be postmarked or hand delivered to select AQD offices at least 10 business days prior to beginning a demolition or renovation project. Not anymore.

The AQD recently automated the notification process through online submittal, eliminating delays, reducing paper and saving money for businesses conducting demolitions and renovations.

What used to be a paper-intensive process for both the DEQ staff and its customers is now done completely online, making the handling of envelopes and date stamping nearly obsolete, while generating less paper and filing activities.

The asbestos notifications are processed faster due in part to the new online form, which prevents users from making errors or incomplete notification submissions, which used to require follow-up from DEQ staff.

The online notification system eliminates delays in starting demolition or renovation projects, as well as saves contractors postal and overnight delivery costs. When those costs are multiplied by 7,500 annual notifications and an additional 3,000 revised notifications, that starts to add up to some real dollar savings.

The new technology offers greater convenience to the user. It can be accessed from any computer with Internet access and submission of original or revised notifications can be submitted 24/7 and at no cost to the user.

Finally, the information provided online is automatically populated into a public online application, which allows anyone to search all original and revised notifications submitted to the department.

With this public access, the owner of the property being demolished or renovated can track their contractor's work.

So, how does this impact contractors and businesses conducting demolitions and renovations?

For Lucille James, Genesee County Land Bank Demolition Program Manager, these improvements have been beneficial to the contractors they oversee.

"We have required all contractors to use the State of Michigan online system for all notifications of demolition and renovation projects," said James. "This paperless system allows us to track contractor's work

efficiently and economically. The secure system saves time and prevents miscommunications."

The Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) is taking over permitting for the 4,000 properties Detroit has highlighted as critical blight.

According to Irvin Poke, Director of LARA's Construction Codes, "This online notification system will assist in the more timely execution of the demolition process. This will be a huge step in facilitating the demolition process throughout the state so that we can prepare communities for rehabilitation faster."

