

Prepared, Not Delivered
Opening Statement
Chairman Michael G. Oxley
House Committee on Financial Services
Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity

**“The Erosion of Communities and Home Values by Leaking Underground
Storage Tanks”**

September 12, 2002

Today’s hearing marks the continuation of this committee’s interest in the overall issue of brownfields. These are lightly contaminated sites that, with the right incentives, could be redeveloped into productive properties that create jobs and generate tax revenue. Congressman Gary Miller has introduced a bill that would make HUD’s brownfields programs more effective, and I remain hopeful that his proposals will be enacted into law before the end of the session.

Leaking underground storage tanks are a significant source of environmental contamination in our communities. It’s estimated that of the half million brownfields sites across the country, nearly 200,000 are impacted by petroleum leaks from tanks. One of my prior legislative responsibilities involved oversight of the LUST program at the Environmental Protection Agency. I tried to make that program more responsive to states and localities, and I know that important work is continuing.

Congressman Paul Kanjorski today brings the subcommittee’s attention to the impact that pollution from leaking tanks can have on residential housing. Housing is the bedrock of strong neighborhoods and vibrant communities. It’s a concern when environmental contamination raises questions about personal health, housing values, and a community’s quality of life.

I’m pleased that we will again be listening to testimony from Charlie Bartsch of the Northeast-Midwest Institute, who was a witness at our brownfields hearing. The Northeast-Midwest Institute and NALGEP, the National Association of Local Government Environmental Professionals, are the authors of a detailed study titled "Recycling America’s Gas Stations." This report has a number of useful observations on how to accelerate the cleanup and redevelopment of properties impacted by petroleum contamination.

I again congratulate the subcommittee for its focus on important community development issues.