



SMUD Thornton On-Site Review

The SMUD Thornton Avenue former electrical substation is located at 1610 Thornton Avenue, Sacramento, California, and is identified in DTSC records as EnviroStor Site: 60002764. DTSC's current project documents describe it as a former electrical substation on an approximately 0.29-acre parcel in a light industrial/commercial area.

SMUD acquired the property from PG&E in 1946 and reportedly operated the substation until about 1993.

Technical Advisor On-Site Review

The site presents as a vacant, fenced, aging industrial property with a visibly deteriorated built environment. The dominant structure is a long, low industrial building with red brick walls, boarded window openings, and a large weathered corrugated metal roof showing extensive rust staining, patchwork repairs, and surface wear. The Technical Advisor site review saw portions of the building enveloped in visibly poor condition, including aged siding, discoloration, and localized cracking in masonry along the exterior wall. The structure appears unused and secured against entry.

The parcel itself looks largely bare and unlandscaped, with a mix of compacted dirt, gravelly surface conditions, sparse vegetation, debris, and scattered volunteer plant growth near fencing and



wall lines. A chain-link fence topped with barbed wire surrounds much of the property, reinforcing the impression that the site is closed off from public access. There are also visible paved areas around the perimeter, including roadway or parking surfaces adjacent to the fenced lot. One facade retains faded painted signage reading “Retail” and “Wholesale,” suggesting long-standing industrial or warehouse-style use in the area.

From a Technical Advisor perspective, the site’s physical condition is important for community communication because it visually reads as a legacy industrial property with deferred maintenance, restricted access, and a long operational history. That appearance alone does not prove contamination, but it does help explain why the property may draw community concern and why clear outreach is needed to distinguish between the visible condition of the building and the actual contaminants confirmed by further sampling and DTSC review.

Site History and Confirmed Environmental Concerns

The current DTSC remedial documents indicate that the key environmental issue at the site is soil contamination, not simply building deterioration. According to DTSC’s Initial Study and related CEQA materials, several site investigations were conducted between 2007 and 2019, including a Preliminary Endangerment Assessment (PEA). That work concluded that soil and surficial gravel at the site are impacted by arsenic and lead, and that the surface gravel itself was either impacted by a release of those metals or may be acting as a source contributing to underlying soil impacts.

DTSC’s project description explains that the arsenic-impacted soil extends laterally throughout the SMUD property and, in many areas, extends to depths greater than 5 feet below ground surface. In localized areas, the contamination is shallower, while in other places it extends deeper, in some locations to 7.5 to 10 feet below ground surface or deeper than 10 feet. DTSC also reports that arsenic-impacted soil extends approximately 10 feet east beyond the property boundary onto the adjacent property, with depths there ranging from about 3 feet below ground surface to greater than 5 feet.

This matters because the site is not described as having a minor surface-only issue. The agency documents support a picture of widespread metals-impacted soil, with both on-site and limited off-site lateral extension, and with enough depth to require a structured cleanup rather than a simple surface scrape. The official CEQA description also confirms that the remedy addresses the potential for leaching to groundwater, meaning the concern is not limited to direct soil contact alone.

Current Remedial Action and Cleanup Approach

DTSC's approved remedy is a Remedial Action Plan (RAP) centered on soil excavation and off-site disposal. The remedial action calls for excavation of approximately 4,500 cubic yards of soil from the site and the eastern adjacent property. Excavation is expected to extend to a maximum depth of 10 feet below ground surface. After removal, excavated areas are to be backfilled with clean soil, and the adjacent property's asphalt pavement and concrete curb are to be restored. DTSC and SMUD describe this as the most effective and acceptable alternative for achieving the site's remedial objectives.

The remedial action objectives are especially relevant for public education. DTSC states that the cleanup is intended to: prevent direct human contact with contaminated soil and gravel, prevent ingestion of contaminated soil and gravel, prevent inhalation of contaminated soil and gravel above acceptable commercial/industrial exposure thresholds, and prevent migration of contaminants from soil and gravel that could affect groundwater.

The project documents estimate that approximately 274 truck trips will be required to transport excavated soil. Based on historical analytical data, DTSC anticipates that about 1,500 cubic yards of excavated soil may classify as RCRA hazardous waste, about 2,000 cubic yards as non-RCRA hazardous waste, and about 1,000 cubic yards as non-hazardous waste. The hazardous soil is expected to go to an appropriate Class I hazardous waste disposal facility. The overall fieldwork duration is estimated at about 12 to 16 weeks.



Air, Dust, and Work Controls During Excavation

Because the selected remedy is excavation-based, DTSC's documents acknowledge the potential for dust generation during digging, handling, stockpiling, and truck loading. The agency states that dust emissions are to be managed under a Dust Control and Air Monitoring Plan, with compliance tied to Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District Rules 401, 402, and 403. The documents specifically mention light spraying or misting with water over excavation areas, handling areas, haul roads, and potentially over soils in transport trucks.

Community members often associate cleanup with a new source of exposure. DTSC's plan reflects the opposite goal: to control airborne particulates and reduce the chance that excavation activities themselves could create nuisance dust or exposure risk for on-site workers or off-site receptors. It also provides a good entry point for public education on why dust suppression, air monitoring, and managed truck loading are standard cleanup protections rather than signs of a worsening condition.

Regulatory and Public Process Status

The public review process for the draft CEQA document ran from August 19, 2025 through September 19, 2025. DTSC's CEQA filings show that the project was processed under a Negative Declaration, and the later Notice of Determination indicates DTSC approved the project on March 3, 2026 and found the project would not have a significant environmental effect as approved.

SMUD's own CEQA webpage mirrors DTSC's project description and states the remedy was selected because it is the most effective and acceptable approach for meeting the remedial action objectives. SMUD also states the action is anticipated to take 12 to 16 weeks, matching DTSC's CEQA documents.

Technical Interpretation for TAG Outreach

From a technical advisory standpoint, the SMUD Thornton site is best described as a former utility substation property with confirmed metals contamination in soil and gravel, requiring targeted excavation and controlled off-site disposal. The public-facing issue is not simply that the property looks old or abandoned. The real issue, as confirmed in DTSC's records, is that arsenic and lead are present in site soil and surficial material at levels that required formal agency review and an approved remedial action.

For community messaging, the site photographs are useful because they show a property that residents can easily identify as older, fenced, industrial, and inactive. However, outreach should carefully explain that contamination is determined by investigation and lab analysis, not by appearance alone. The contamination at this site was documented through multiple investigations over more than a decade, and the selected remedy reflects those findings.