

The Phase I Environmental Site Assessment Q&A

What is a Phase I ESA?

The Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) is a screening-level environmental assessment which aims to detect recognized environmental conditions on the subject property. Recognized environmental conditions may include hazardous materials spills on the property, improper chemical or fuel storage on the property, or nearby leaking underground storage tanks, among other conditions.

Why perform a Phase I ESA?

Many lenders require a Phase I ESA to assess a property for environmental risk before they will approve loans for development or construction projects. New purchasers of property may wish to have a Phase I ESA completed so that they can be aware of any recognized environmental conditions on a property before they finalize a purchase. Completion of a full Phase I ESA may also qualify the purchaser for Landowner Liability Protections (LLP) under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA).

What's new in the Phase I ESA market?

New regulations have recently been developed by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to govern the way Phase I ESAs are performed. These regulations, known as the "All Appropriate Inquiries" (AAI) standard, require additional database searches and interviews during the investigation, necessitate that additional information be provided by the client, and increase the education and experience requirements for environmental professionals who may perform the Phase I ESA.

The new AAI regulations took effect November 1, 2006. NOA's staff exceeds the requirements of AAI, and our Phase I reports are fully AAI-compliant.

What is the shelf life of a Phase I ESA?

A Phase I ESA is good for six months after its date of completion. After that point, a Phase I Update or a new Phase I ESA can be completed. When a Phase I ESA is one year or more old, it can no longer be updated; a new report must be completed.

What is included in a Phase I ESA?

The Phase I ESA includes the following components:

- Search of government databases for property and vicinity
- Interviews and/or database search at local agencies for property and adjacent land
- Review of historical records, including aerial photos and maps
- Visual inspection of subject property and vicinity
- Review of environmental questionnaire completed by client and property owner
- Physical setting information for the area
- Findings and conclusions indicating whether or not Recognized Environmental Conditions were identified

At the special request of the client, the Phase I ESA can address the following as well:

- Search for environmental liens and land use limitations on the subject property
- Expanded database search
- Lead-based paint and asbestos-containing materials
- Oil and gas wells
- Radon
- Drinking water quality

Why choose NOA?

NOA's environmental professionals have completed hundreds of Phase I ESAs and equivalent assessments and meet the new requirements of AAI. Our clients include developers, landowners, real property lenders, and school districts. We involve our clients in the Phase I ESA process by notifying them promptly of our findings throughout the investigation. Contact us today for more information.

