EDR Historical Topographic Map Report

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The Standard in Environmental Risk Management Information

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Environmental Data Resources, Inc.'s (EDR) Historical Topographic Map Report is designed to assist professionals in evaluating potential liability on a target property, and its surrounding area, resulting from past activities. ASTM E 1527-00, Section 7.3 on Historical Use Information, identifies the prior use requirements for a Phase I environmental site assessment. The ASTM standard requires a review of reasonably ascertainable standard historical sources. Reasonably ascertainable is defined as information that is publicly available, obtainable from a source with reasonable time and cost constraints, and practically reviewable. To meet the prior use requirements of ASTM E 1527-00, Section 7.3.4, the following standard historical sources may be used: aerial photographs, city directories, fire insurance maps, topographic maps, property tax files, land title records (although these cannot be the sole historical source consulted), building department records, or zoning/land use records. ASTM E 1527-00 requires "All obvious uses of the property shall be identified from the present, back to the property's obvious first developed use, or back to 1940, whichever is earlier. This task requires reviewing only as many of the standard historical sources as are necessary, and that are reasonably ascertainable and likely to be useful." (ASTM E 1527-00, Section 7.3.2 page 12.)

EDR's Historical Topographic Map Report includes a search of available public and private color historical topographic map collections.

Topographic Maps
A topographic map (topo) is a color coded line-and-symbol representation of natural and selected artificial features plotted to a scale. Topos show the shape, elevation, and development of the terrain in precise detail by using contour lines and color coded symbols. Many features are shown by lines that may be straight, curved, solid, dashed, dotted, or in any combination. The colors of the lines usually indicate similar classes of information. For example, topographic contours (brown); lakes, streams, irrigation ditches, etc. (blue); land grids and important roads (red); secondary roads and trails, railroads, boundaries, etc. (black); and features that have been updated using aerial photography, but not field verified, such as disturbed land areas (e.g., gravel pits) and newly developed water bodies (purple).

For more than a century, the USGS has been creating and revising topographic maps for the entire country at a variety of scales. There are about 60,000 U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) produced topo maps covering the United States. Each map covers a specific quadrangle (quad) defined as a four-sided area bounded by latitude and longitude. Historical topographic maps are a valuable historical resource for documenting the prior use of a property and its surrounding area, and due to their frequent availability can be particularly helpful when other standard historical sources (such as city directories, fire insurance maps, or aerial photographs) are not reasonably ascertainable.

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