

Property databases save time

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ton, Macomb, Washtenaw, Kent and Ottawa counties before the end of the year, Golden said.

THE IDEA was conceived when Golden's husband, a partner in the development firm of Universal Development Inc. in Bloomfield Hills, became frustrated trying to locate vacant land, she said.

"We found out there wasn't an easy way to do it so we decided to do it ourselves."

Now, almost a year after publishing its first directory, Land Data boasts 3,000 subscribers including developers, builders, real estate agents, survey companies, appraisers, title companies and banks.

Annual hookup fees start at \$800 with unlimited use plans ranging from \$85 to \$110 depending on options.

Discounts are offered for customers who hook up more than one terminal. Other plans, per-call services and specialized services are available at less expensive rates.

TOXICHECK Environmental Information Services Inc., a Farmington company that provides information on potential hazardous contamination of properties, has

doubled its sales yearly since opening.

According to president Mark Bennett, concern about the environment and cleanup costs for contaminated sites fuels his business.

Developers dealing in land need to know if property they are considering is polluted.

"It goes back to the old adage information is knowledge and knowledge is power," he said.

TOXICHECK's database incorporates information on landfills, federal super fund sites, and properties designated as contaminated by state and county agencies.

The database covers more than 30 counties throughout Michigan, Illinois and Indiana, he said.

BENNETT'S COMPANY is not the solution for developers and builders who are considering property purchases, but only the first step, he said.

"It's one element in the process of a purchase."

After consulting his database, most developers undertake on-site testing and evaluation.

Some land buyers might use his service to make an initial decision on whether to buy land, but most do more extensive work through environmental engineers and consultants.

NEW LAWS have put the responsibility for environmental contamination on the owner, he said. A person who buys property also buys the responsibility for the cleanup.

A buyer's only defense is to practice "environmental due diligence," he said.

No one can afford to buy a parcel of property without checking into possible hazardous contamination, he said.

"WE GENERATE a custom map with a radius of two miles — any site that has been discovered to be contaminated is shown on the map."

Customers of the service include

real estate agents, developers, builders, attorneys and banks.

In addition to the custom maps, TOXICHECK also provides written executive summaries for clients explaining the maps.

Bennett got the idea for his company while working for a law firm with an emphasis on environmental policy for its developer and building clients.

He found that individual research on each property was time consuming and costly, and so he started his own company.

Customized, detailed maps range in cost from \$95 to \$295 depending on property zoning.

Legislation readied

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The new legislation would also allow communities to enter into "development agreements" which would create builders that laws affecting their projects will not change during the project's construction.

In turn, communities negotiate for developer-financed infrastructure

and project phasing to insure a concurrency of services and facilities.

Fisher also said new legislation is needed to reform special assessment laws because recent court cases have "over-limited" the ability to assess special taxes.

Current laws allow assessments only for work that directly effects or adjoins a parcel, he said.

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