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Standard Guide for Environmental Site Assessments: Phase II Environmental Site Assessment Process¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This guide² covers a framework for employing good commercial and customary practices in conducting a Phase II environmental site assessment (ESA) of a parcel of commercial property with respect to the potential presence of a range of contaminants which are within the scope of CERCLA as well as petroleum products.

1.1.1 This guide is intended to provide practical procedural guidance for the continuation of an assessment conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of Practice E 1527 or E 1528, or both. Practice E 1527 is the practice for conducting Phase I ESAs for a parcel of commercial property and Practice E 1528 is the transaction screen practice. Both practices define a process that is intended to constitute “all appropriate inquiry into the previous ownership and uses of a property” to determine whether hazardous substances or petroleum products have been disposed or released there in order to satisfy one element of the innocent purchaser defense to CERCLA liability.

1.1.2 Because this guide for conducting Phase II ESAs describes a process for further evaluating a parcel of commercial property with recognized environmental conditions, as defined in Practices E 1527 and E 1528, users of this guide should understand the requirements and limitations of those practices. It is strongly recommended that the user refer to and apply the guide in concert with Practices E 1527 and E 1528.

1.1.3 This guide has multiple purposes. It is intended to provide assistance to users in satisfying the appropriate inquiry element of CERCLA’s innocent purchaser defense, as defined in 42 U.S.C. § 9601(35)(B), where a previous assessment satisfying that element identified recognized environmental conditions. This guide also is intended to assist a user in

gathering reliable information about a property’s environmental conditions to guide the user’s business decisions. However, this guide does not purport to include the level of specificity required of technical standards that govern full characterization of a site’s environmental conditions.

1.2 *Objectives*—The primary objectives of conducting a Phase II ESA are to evaluate the recognized environmental conditions identified in the Phase I ESA or transaction screen process for the purpose of providing sufficient information regarding the nature and extent of contamination to assist in making informed business decisions about the property; and where applicable, providing the level of knowledge necessary to satisfy the innocent purchaser defense under CERCLA.

1.2.1 To achieve these objectives, it may be appropriate to perform more than a single iteration of assessment. The guide fosters an iterative approach to Phase II assessments and allows the user to terminate the Phase II ESA at the point where sufficient data have been generated to meet the user’s objectives.

1.2.2 At the completion of a Phase II ESA, the environmental professional should be able to conclude, at a minimum, that either (a) the ESA has provided sufficient information to render a professional opinion that there is no reasonable basis to suspect the presence of hazardous substances or petroleum products at the property associated with the recognized environmental conditions under assessment, or (b) the ESA has confirmed the presence of hazardous substances or petroleum products at the property under conditions that indicate disposal or release. If the information developed in the ESA is insufficient for the environmental professional to reach either of these conclusions, the environmental professional may recommend additional iterations of assessment if warranted to meet the objectives of the user. If the environmental professional reasonably suspects that unconfirmed hazardous substance or petroleum releases remain but concludes that further reasonable assessment is not expected to provide additional information of significant value, he may recommend that further assessment is not warranted. In such circumstances, the recommendation for no further assessment should be accompanied by an explanation why a reasonable suspicion of releases remains and why further reasonable assessment is not warranted. Depending upon the work scope, the environmental professional may also be able to provide guidance on the nature

¹ This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E-50 on Environmental Assessment and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E50.02 on Commercial Real Estate Transactions.

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² As used herein, a “Standard” is a document that has been developed and established within the consensus principles of the Society and that meets the approval requirements of ASTM procedures and regulations. A “Guide” is a compendium of information or a series of options that does not recommend a specific course of action. A guide increases the awareness of information and approaches in a given subject area. A “Practice,” in contrast, is a definitive set of instructions for performing one or more specific operations that does not produce a test result. See Form and Style for ASTM Standards, 10th ed., 1996.