

Exposing the real dirt on dirt

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New video series from a construction group pushes for better soil management

It's a dirty subject, but Ontario construction groups aren't shying away from the discussion about what happens to the almost 26 million cubic metres of excess construction soil generated in Ontario each year. Quite the opposite, they're prepared to dig right in.

"We'd like to increase awareness among everybody that this isn't just an environmental issue," said Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

In September, RCCAO announced a new video series called *The Real Dirt on Dirt: Solutions for Construction Soil Management*. Co-produced with the Greater Toronto Sewer and Watermain Contractors Association, the three-part series outlines the financial and environmental benefits of implementing best practices for excess clean soil removal, including the use of soil matching.

Following the example set by a U.K. organization called CL:AIRE, RCCAO is working to create a leading-edge soil matching registry to facilitate better planning and handling of clean soils that need to be removed from infrastructure, development and construction projects.

The idea is to encourage reuse of construction soils while supporting regulatory requirements and community expectations, such as solutions for temporary soil storage. Fewer trucks would be on the road, travelling shorter distances, and a process would be in place to ensure best practices are followed.

According to Manahan, the solution requires participation from multiple stakeholders. For example, municipalities typically rely on bidding contractors to incorporate hauling costs — commonly referred to as dig and dump — into their road, water main and building proposals.



Ontario's construction industry generates almost 26 million cubic metres of excess construction soil every year — enough dirt to fill Toronto's Rogers Centre 16 times. With better soil management, fewer trucks will travel less distance and cause less wear and tear to roads.

RCCAO is proposing that cities take a more proactive approach upfront and incorporate possible soil re-use scenarios as part of the tender.

The new video series reports that roughly \$2 billion is spent annually to manage excess soil in Ontario, with nearly two million trucks hauling dirt across the province each year.

A study of 24 projects in the GTA found that using a 'dig and dump' strategy adds 14 per cent to the cost

of municipal infrastructure projects on average. A soil registry provides opportunity for potential savings that can then be passed on.

RCCAO's soil matching registry (SOiIL.com) targets individuals and companies who either generate excess soil or require fill.

Once they register, they share details such as site location, estimated volumes, timing and any environmental reports, and search for partnering opportunities.

Qualified professionals will have a role to verify "soil is clean as advertised" and to allay concerns at a receiving site, explained Manahan.

Next month, the Canadian Urban Institute will convene its second soil symposium in Ajax, Ontario, featuring a keynote by newly appointed Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks Rod Phillips.

Topics include preventing and responding to illegal fill dumping, increasing soil reuse, improving soil

quality, reducing carbon emissions and tracking soil haulage activities. Manahan is hopeful soil matching will also be highlighted.

"The soil matching idea is going to start to spread. We're hopeful that we're not going to be laggards but leaders," he said. "It's a bit of a chicken and egg situation. We have something in place, but we also need the government to support it."

To view the three-part video series, visit www.SOiIL.com.

The facts about radon for new homeowners



HOWARD BOGACH
YOUR
NEW HOME

When you were in school, you might have learned about radon in science class or memorized it as part of the periodic table — but you may not have thought about it since.

November is National Radon Action Month so it's a good time for a refresher on radon and why it should matter to new home owners.

Here are five basic facts:

1. Radon is an odourless, invisible gas created by the breakdown of uranium found in rock and soil. When it escapes from the ground and mixes with the air, it is diluted to very low levels.

2. Almost every house in Canada has some radon. Concentration levels can vary widely from area to area and even among different homes in the same neighbourhood.

3. With proper ventilation, radon will dissipate causing no problems at all. Unfortunately, enclosed spaces without good airflow — such as basements, crawlspaces — can develop dangerously high radon levels when the gas becomes trapped.

4. Long-term exposure to excessive radon can increase the risk of lung cancer.

5. Radon is not the result of a defect in the way a home is constructed. There is no way to determine if radon is going to be a problem before a home is built and most homes are not tested after they're built.

Like carbon monoxide, radon can be detected and measured. You can measure radon using either a do-it-yourself radon test kit or by hiring a radon measurement and mitigation professional.

The gas is measured in units called 'becquerels' and Health Canada has set 200 becquerels per cubic metre

as the safe limit for radon in a home.

If you're an owner of a new home and you have excessive levels of radon, the good news is that your statutory warranty includes coverage for a full seven years. In fact, Ontario is the only Canadian jurisdiction that covers radon remediation in the statutory new home warranty.

To be eligible for coverage, radon levels must be tested over a three-month period and whether you use a radon professional or a do-it-yourself radon test kit, both must be certified through the Canadian National Radon Proficiency Program. Test results showing levels in excess of 200

becquerels should be submitted to Tarion along with the applicable warranty form.

To learn more about radon and your warranty coverage, you can visit Tarion.com or watch our new video on YouTube. If you have questions about how to make a warranty claim, you can contact us at 1-877-9TARION or email customerservice@tarion.com

— Howard Bogach is president and CEO of Tarion Warranty Corp. which protects the rights of new home buyers and regulates new home builders in Ontario. Visit www.tarion.com.