

Industry Perspectives: Let's get moving on excess soils framework ASAP

by [Andy Manahan](#) Jul 18, 2016

The opportunities to reuse excess soils are piling up quickly across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. Take Mississauga's Inspiration Lakeview, the masterplan for a 245-acre sustainable waterfront with new homes, restaurants and pavilions. The city's eastern lakeshore project includes plans for lake fill taken from Peel Region's Hanlan Water Project.



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A temporary "soil bank" site was chosen and the excess soils will be used to connect the waterfront trail between the Ontario Power Generation lands and Marie Curtis Park. The additional waterfront lands also will increase environmental habitats and create recreational opportunities. These concepts were well received by local residents who provided input during public consultation meetings.

Even with the region's incredible pace of construction, we could use more projects like Inspiration Lakeview. Soil is being trucked all over southern Ontario with little organization and accountability in tracking movements.

That's why the province has looked to the U.K. — well before the Brexit vote — to get some inspiration on how to create a framework for handling excess soils. The industry-led non-profit organization Contaminated Land: Applications in Real Environment (CL:AIRE) tracks the amount of soil removed, its characteristics and the locations it is moved from and to. The CL:AIRE approach and model represents a sound example for Ontario.

The province also looked to the public. In January, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) initiated a 60-day consultation and review process. That's when the government released the Excess Soil Management Policy Framework and received more than 100 submissions and 1,300 individual comments. Among the supporters of the framework were the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO)** and sister association Supporting Ontario Infrastructure Investments and Lands.

Among its goals, the province wants to:

develop a new source site regulation so that developers and construction companies have a clear set of rules to follow;

consider creating incentives for municipalities that set up excess soil storage and processing sites;

develop standards and enforcement guidelines emphasizing beneficial reuse of excess soil;

use a multi-ministry approach (between MOECC and the newly minted Ministry of Municipal Affairs, or MMA) to improve co-ordination and increase awareness among municipal officials and local communities; and

increase adoption of the MOECC's Best Management Practices (BMP) guide, including outreach education and incorporation of BMP wording in municipal tender documents.

While the government deserves kudos for moving on this issue, an accelerated time frame would be preferable.

In the meantime, while the industry awaits the framework and standards, confusion and inconsistencies will continue. This will result in lost opportunities and a knock-on effect of consequences.

A lack of upfront planning means more trucks on the road, which adds to the region's congested traffic and contributes to Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions. In turn, unnecessary wear and tear on our roads costs taxpayers through higher municipal and provincial taxes and the added costs related to transport and disposal mean less money is allocated to other desperately needed infrastructure.

Worse still, it can lead to problems such as what has unravelled at the Burlington Executive Airport, where thousands of truckloads of soil were dumped over several years. The Ontario Supreme Court recently ruled in favour of the City of Burlington, which objected to the use of the airport as an excess soil site. The airport owners must remove all fill deposited between 2008 and 2013.

A common vision for the construction sector, municipal and provincial governments and the public will be required to conserve resources and reduce our environmental footprint as we build the necessary infrastructure in Ontario. Let's take the first step to make this vision a reality.

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