



Province 'doing nothing to protect' environment from soil dumps: OSRTF

Grounds for concern

Mike Barrett/Metroland

Ontario Soil Regulation Task Force chairperson, Ian McLaurin, worries that proposed changes to the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine legislation will make it easier to dump soil from construction sites, some of which may be contaminated, on environmentally sensitive lands.

Aurora Banner

By [Lisa Queen](#)

Will the provincial government's updated growth plans for the Greater Golden Horseshoe expected in early 2017 do enough to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt from being the dumping ground of soil from construction sites, including potentially contaminated fill?

Ian McLaurin has his doubts, although the provincial government said it has strong regulations governing the disposal of excess soil.

McLaurin is the chair of the Ontario Soil Regulation Task Force, a not-for-profit organization of volunteers representing community groups concerned about the dumping of excess soil.

"The issue is that they're doing nothing to protect us, they're not adding any extra protections against the soil dumps. In fact, they are opening it up to allow the disposal of industrial waste. We're mainly concerned that the government doesn't have sufficient regulations to protect the environment" he said, adding he is concerned about the impact on residents' health.

"We want extra protecting in the Greenbelt against the dumping of soil and the disposal of waste -- no commercial waste disposal within the Oak Ridges Moraine area ... The proposed legislation permits the disposal of industrial waste in the protected areas of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Which is ridiculous, they are supposed to be protected."

The task force is lobbying for a clean soil act, arguing there are sites across rural Ontario where hundreds of trucks dump excess construction soil, including potentially contaminated soil.

Given the amount of construction taking place in southern Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe, where today's population of nine million will jump to 13.5 million by 2041, the moraine and Greenbelt are particularly vulnerable, McLaurin said.

"The issue is that there's millions of tonnes and cubic metres of soil that comes out of urban areas, Toronto and that sort of thing, from construction zones and excavations for condos

because they have to go down many, many metres to build their parking garages and their foundations,” McLaurin said.

“And then there’s the subways they’re digging, the soil from that has to go somewhere. We also have old industrial lands and old gas stations that have to be rehabilitated and they have to get rid of the contaminated soil. So, some of that soil that comes from excavations is mixed with some soil that comes from industrial areas, which has some contamination in it.”

Municipalities and conservation authorities are the main permitting agencies for soil management activities, Ministry of Environment spokesperson Lindsay Davidson said in an email.

Meanwhile, the ministry released an excess soil management policy in December to help ensure excess soil from development activities is managed in a way that protects people’s health and the environment, he said.

“This framework includes 21 actions, many of which are now underway. They include development of new regulations to help ensure excess soil is relocated appropriately and includes excess soil reuse standards, technical guidance and market-based tools to improve the movement of excess soil in Ontario,” he said.

“Development of these policies followed extensive consultation, including with municipalities, industry and concerned organizations such as the Ontario Soil Regulation Task Force.”

The issue of excess soils is a complicated issue governed by the strong provincial framework, Joe Vaccaro, CEO of the Ontario Home Builders’ Association, said.

But there’s no getting away from the fact that significant growth is coming and that means excess soil from construction sites, he said.

“If the concern is that new provincial requirements for more intensification and density, meaning more towers and townhouses and public transit infrastructure, mean more soil will need to be moved out of the Toronto and the GTA, the answer is yes, more excess soils from those sites are going to have to find a new home,” he said.

“Specific to dumping, again, there is a very strong regulatory framework and rules that governs where the soil can go. But we have to deal with both realities. If the provincial push is for more intensification supported by transit, then those projects will generate excess soil that must find a new home.”

But McLaurin wonders just how stringently the provincial government’s regulations are enforced.

“The thing about the Greenbelt acts is they leave it up to the municipalities to enforce it. The province doesn’t really enforce it so it’s up to municipalities and they have kind of neglected it. There is really no strong incentive for them to step in,” he said.

“People are moving out into the Greenbelt because they like the greenness of it, they like being out in the country, they like being away from the big business of the city and the industry in the city, they come out here and they find it follows them ... If it’s clean soil, it has to go somewhere, you might accept it, but if it turns out that it might be industrial waste being disposed of, it’s not pleasant at all because you’re worried about your health.”