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Soil disposal comes with a pricetag: Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario report

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Due to rising costs and greater restrictions, up to 15 per cent of the costs of infrastructure projects will have to be dedicated to the disposal of excavated soil, found a new report released by the [Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario \(RCCAO\)](#).

“We hope we can work with the government in developing clear, consistent, pragmatic rules for managing excavated soils in Ontario,” said RCCAO executive director Andy Manahan. “This represents a significant opportunity to reduce construction costs and stretch public infrastructure dollars.”

With the amount of projects that are currently going on in Ontario, the quantity of excess construction soil is likely to increase greatly in the coming years, says the report. Municipalities are increasing restrictions or introducing bans on the importation of fill and soil from outside their boundaries, which can result in higher transportation costs and increased greenhouse gas emissions as excess soils will have to be transported longer distances, says the report.

Report author, consultant and environmental lawyer Frank Zechner, says these unnecessary and added costs represent “a significant erosion of taxpayers’ dollars that would otherwise be available for badly-needed infrastructure improvements.”

The report, [Eglinton LRT Project: Estimated Costs and Impacts of Addressing Excess Construction Soils](#), looked at the first phase Metrolinx Eglinton Crosstown Light Rail Transit Project in Toronto which could result in the displacement of approximately 1,500,000 cubic metres of soil and fill.

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The study estimates that managing the excess soils for this project could cost be \$65 million to over \$100 million, depending on variables such as distance, loads and landfill costs. Manahan pointed out that this estimate assumes the cleanest Table 1 soils and said it’s more difficult to find a place for Table 2 or 3 soils.

“Barring options such as the creation of artificial islands in Lake Ontario, the only large-scale sites that can likely accommodate fill quantities in excess of 100,000 cubic metres are landfills,” says the report.

Another project, the City of Toronto’s own water and sewer capital program, will produce more than 800,000 cubic metres between now and the end of the decade.

Manahan said the RCCAO and others in construction have been warning the province about the issue for years. RCCAO has established a steering committee to develop construction industry best practices for managing excavated soils.

“Cumulatively, all of the infrastructure projects out there the big and the small are really going to be problematic if you don’t deal with solutions,” he said.

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This report is in addition to various RCCAO ads about excess construction soils.

“I want to keep the pressure on,” said Manahan.

“This isn’t going away, so let’s keep on talking about solutions.”

Manahan pointed to the province of Quebec, which views soils as a beneficial reuse.

“It’s not something that’s treated as garbage that’s thrown away; it’s something that can be reused. If there are trace elements of salt, it can still be reused. It’s not something that’s going to create a landfill pile,” he said.

Manahan added that is the fundamental principle he would like to see the government adopt, but it would require regulatory changes.

At the end of June the Town of East Gwillimbury, Ont., requested that the province, through the Ministry of Environment (MOE), “establish regulations and a provincially regulated approval process to govern the quality of fill imported to a receiving site other than for the purpose of Brownfield redevelopment,” it said in a letter to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

RCCAO recommends that the province of Ontario “establish a pragmatic, risk-based, and affordable framework that distinguishes excess construction soils, particularly those from municipal roads and rights of ways, from historic industrial hazardous wastes which are the primary focus of laws such as Ontario Regulation 153/04,” says the report.