



Proposed Best Management Practices will serve as guidelines for the Ontario construction industry on how to deal with excess soils.

Construction soils guidelines include soils matching service

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A newly released report will guide the construction industry on how to handle excess soils in Ontario.

"It is becoming more restrictive to find places for excess soils because of the definition of waste and what municipalities are doing because of their concerns with liability," explained Andy Manahan, executive director of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO)**.

"Rather than consider these soils to be waste, consider them to be a resource to be used again wherever possible."

"[Best Management Practices for Handling Excess Construction Soils in Ontario](#)" advances some positive solutions as many municipalities are currently restricting or banning soils being shipped from outside their jurisdictions because of liability concerns. Currently only soils associated with brownfield sites are regulated in Ontario.

"An unintended consequence of the regulatory changes made in 2009 was confusion and negative project impacts regarding the movement and handling of "clean" excess construction soils, particularly from smaller municipal, residential, and commercial projects," explains the report.

Manahan says municipalities are looking for guidelines on what to do with their excess soils as there is currently nothing. The report proposes a system that recognizes that some of the soil can be re-used, or remediated and re-used.

"It's an awareness level that there are other solutions out there rather than imposing more restrictive bylaws," said Manahan.

Manahan expects the report will be an evolving document as lessons are learned. RCCAO says it plans to field test its proposals and to further refine its best management practices.

The report proposes ideas such as a "soil matching service" similar to a system run by [Contaminated Land: Applications in Real Environments \(CL:AIRE\)](#) in the United Kingdom, which brings together generators and receivers of excess construction soils, and facilitates transfers between them.

Manahan said about 60 per cent of the people going on the U.K. website are actually looking for soils. CL:AIRE recently proposed some modifications to the service, such as providing information of the cost of disposing soils through the BMP route or via a landfill.

“That kind of information I think would encourage even more people to say ‘OK there’s something that’s meaningful here,’” said Manahan.

The document recommends a transparent process that produces a Materials Management Plan for the handling of non-waste excess soils tied to the remediation and/or development plans for the site involved. It also recommends the further development of recycling centres.

The industry BMP process was developed in consultation with the [Ministry of Environment \(MOE\)](#), and is intended to complement the current MOE’s soils best management practices document. The MOE has not issued its final report, which does not cover civil construction projects and development projects. The RCCAO’s report is meant to “fill in some blanks,” said Manahan.

In a news release, Ontario environment minister Jim Bradley said RCCAO’s report “is a good step forward as we move toward new rules for use of excess construction soils. The province will be putting forward its proposals shortly for public comment.”

RCCAO says the added costs associated with landfilling excavated soil result in taxpayers having to pay up to 15 per cent more for road, sewer and water projects, public transit and other infrastructure, resulting in \$1.7 billion a year.

Bringing the soil to a landfill also means more trucks on the road and increased greenhouse gas emissions. Another consequence is that disposal sites fill up more quickly, displacing available capacity for the legitimate waste stream, points out Manahan.

The document contains an appendix on procurement ***which says that municipalities may be able to take certain steps to address excess construction soils in the tendering process.

“From our perspective, rather than contracting out all the responsibility, we thought if this was something where municipalities could help identify sites like Waterloo region has done, that’s going to result in lower bids from all the different companies that are bidding on this work, that will help save potentially a lot of money,” said Manahan.

The Waterloo regional council has recognized that there will be a lot of excess soils generated when its light rail transit project begins and it is trying to prepare for that. The region currently has a temporary depot where soils can be taken right now and Manahan says the region is thinking differently than other municipalities right now.

Earlier this year, the RCCAO collaborated with the provincial government to form a steering committee, which helped shape the direction of the report. Al Durand was the lead author of the report.

“If it wasn’t for him we wouldn’t have come this far,” said Manahan.