

New online resource helps dig into excess soil issues

by Angela Gismondi Oct 19, 2016

Those looking for information on how to effectively manage excess soil now have access to a new, interactive online tool.

The Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) launched the excess soil bylaw tool website, www.excesssoils.com, Sept. 28.

Amanda Smith, manager of urban infrastructure programs for the CUI, said the goal of the tool is to promote good soil management practices.

"It's an online tool to help empower municipalities to support the beneficial reuse of soil coming into their community through their bylaws," explained Smith.

CUI was commissioned by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs to create the tool to assist Ontario municipalities in developing or updating key sections of site alteration and fill bylaws. The website also provides sample bylaw language informed by Management of Excess Soil — A Guide for Best Management Practices and is based on the feedback received from municipalities, construction associations, non-governmental organizations and qualified professionals, Smith stated.

"We consulted with stakeholders to understand the key issues municipalities are facing with respect to managing excess soils," said Smith. "Once we had an understanding of what those issues were, and based on the issues that the best management practices addresses, then we highlighted those issues on the website and then reviewed Ontario municipal fill and site alteration bylaws and found representative language that helped address the issues we heard were important to municipalities." The issues addressed on the site include aggregate sites, agricultural lands, commercial fill operations, consultation and engagement, cultural heritage, definitions, enforcement, environmentally sensitive areas, facilitating soil matching, fees, cost recovery and financial assurance, fill management plans, invasive species, permits, prohibition or limitation of fill, soil quality, soil sampling, temporary soil storage sites, traffic and transportation and water quality protection.

"It's intended as a tool when municipalities are updating or creating their bylaws, that they can look easily and see how did another municipality handle that and look at that language as an example," said Smith.

With all the development in Toronto and the surrounding area, the management of excess soils in neighbouring municipalities has become more of a key focus in recent years, Smith noted.

When excess soils are generated they may be used at another site provided it does not have an adverse effect on the receiving site. Typically, municipalities may regulate the use of excess soils on these receiving sites or temporary storage sites through site alteration or fill bylaws.

"Their bylaws may not have been created or in place to manage the amount of fill that has typically been coming out of Toronto," said Smith. "In the absence of good municipal bylaws, municipalities may want to discourage soil coming into their community, but we want to help them promote beneficial reuse. By having safe and well-regulated soil management that gives the construction industry an option for reusing soil versus having to take it to a landfill or having to truck it further away."

The website also includes a map with various Ontario municipalities and links to bylaws. While the target audience for the tool is municipalities, it could serve as an informative resource for the construction community as well, explained Smith.

"If you're a contractor, for example, you can look and find the bylaws of the municipality you are in or the neighbouring municipality you might want to take soil to," said Smith. "We thought it would be a quick and easy resource for people."

Andy Manahan, executive director of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario** (RCCAO), echoed Smith's comments.

"Most of the focus on soil issues is in the Greater Toronto Area. It's one of those issues that may not be as high priority in northern Ontario. You have to think about how you're going to manage soil no matter where you are," said Manahan. "This is a really good way to help promote the best management practices guide and hopefully encourage municipalities to do upfront planning and put at least references to the guide in their documentation, whether it's a tender that goes out or a bylaw they're going to be updating."

He suggested this tool could raise awareness and get the industry to move away from the "dig and dump" approach to the "reuse" approach.

"There is an awareness in the RCCAO network but there are all sorts of other construction firms across Ontario that probably don't even know about the best management practices guide," said Manahan. "If they get a tender document, for example, where a municipality has made reference to the guide, hopefully that will help them understand 'I should be thinking about can the soil be reused on the site or in the municipality or in a neighbouring municipality?' 'Are there other infrastructure projects where we might be able to use it?'"