

## Alliance pushes new strategy for dirt

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*By Ashley Csanady*

The costs of removing surplus soil are expected to eat into infrastructure budgets for the Pan Am games, TTC and Metrolinx but one construction group says there's a better way to deal with the issue.

Charges for what is known as soil remediation can devour as much as 15 per cent of public infrastructure projects, according to the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.

But a initiative in the United Kingdom to clean up and re-use excavated soil has not only saved the industry money, it also has cut down on the amount of dirt that takes up space in landfill, according to RCCAO executive director **Andy Manahan**.

Manahan estimates the soil remediation costs for the planned Eglinton LRT could soar as high as \$120 million and costs for other projects in the near future could go even higher.

He said the Association of Municipalities of Ontario has warned his industry that more cities are planning bylaws to keep excavated soil from their landfill. That means soil will have to be hauled further away, increasing fuel costs and emissions.

"Not all of it (excavated soil) is that environmentally damaging," he said.

Manahan is looking forward to a presentation by the Contaminated Land: Applications in Real Environments (CLAIRE) group later this September. He thinks Ontario can learn a lot from the U.K. system, which has lowered development costs and saved the industry more than one million pounds in landfill tax alone.

[CLAIRE](#) promotes the re-use of excavated soil, which can also provide a source of some aggregate. Often that dirt and gravel is taken to a "fixed soil treatment facility" where it's tested and classified. Sometimes "fixed" soil is safe enough for playgrounds or other infrastructure projects but occasionally it's too contaminated for either.

Manahan said the regulatory framework in Ontario is too vague and leaves little room for similar efforts. He pointed to the only specific regulation for excavated soil – 511-09, which is intended for brownfield sites and is actually an environmental law. Consequently, "the practice gravitates toward treating all soil as though it's from a brownfield site."

Closer to home, Quebec is doing a great job of diverting excavated waste from landfills, he said.

"There are alternative solutions out there but this is not going to happen very quickly. Rather than taking it to landfill, let's see if we can re-use it."

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