

Industry pushes plan for excess soil

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By Ashley Csanady

A process developed in the United Kingdom for managing excess soil at construction sites would fill a regulatory gap and reduce remediation costs, the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario says.

The alliance has recommended the U.K. model to the Ministry of the Environment, which is in the process of drafting new best practices for managing excess dirt.

The U.K. model – Contaminated Land: Applications in Real Environments (CLAIRE) – allows leftover soil to be “cleaned” and often reused, alliance executive director **Andy Manahan** said.

Dumping leftover soil is expected to add significant costs to upcoming TTC, Metrolinx and Pan Am Games projects. Soil remediation costs for the Eglinton LRT alone could soar to \$120 million, according to the construction alliance.

Lyndsay Miller, press secretary to Minister **Jim Bradley**, said in an email that the ministry is aware of CLAIRE and that it is developing its own plans for the management of excess soils from large-scale construction projects “with a focus on soils generated from brownfields redevelopment activities.”

But current regulations for dealing with waste soil already focus on brownfield sites and that’s part of the problem, Manahan said.

“From our perspective it’s a void in the regulatory framework,” he said, adding that there needs to be a process to re-use leftover soil at other sites, such as bridge repairs that require soil.

Under current regulations, almost all construction soil is treated like it was taken from a brownfield site, which makes it impossible to re-use even in a project near its extraction.

That’s why the construction alliance says it has been pushing the CLAIRE model, which divides construction soil into classes for re-use, cleansing or disposal.

If the ministry chooses to focus on brownfield sites yet again, the reforms could have little effect on soil remediation costs, as Manahan blames the regulatory gap for the high costs.

There’s some indication, however, that the ministry will incorporate the industry’s suggestions in the draft best practices when they’re posted for public consultation.

“The intent of this work is to clarify the rules and requirements for managing soil to assist construction companies and municipalities and conservation authorities that permit fill sites,” Miller said.

“The ministry intends to provide best practices guidance for managing excess soil at all stages. This would include excavation at the source through transportation and placement at a site where soil can be reused for beneficial purposes.”

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