



## **Dumping ground: Ontario moves to clean up excess soil management policies**

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The dirt on infrastructure spending in Ontario is that a great deal of money is being thrown away. A new policy proposal from the Ontario government aims to put a stop to that.

The dirt is just that — ground or, in industry parlance, “excess soil” that is excavated from infrastructure projects and then, thanks to a tangle of unclear regulations, trucked to distant landfills for disposal instead of being reused nearby. Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential & Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, told *EcoLog News* that excess soil management can account for 5% to 20% of a project’s capital cost.

Rhetorically, he asks: “Wouldn’t we rather, as a province, be spending all that money on infrastructure?”

Manahan says that for a variety of reasons, including potential liability and unclear regulations, municipalities have been using contaminated site tables to characterize excess soil, and under those tables some level of remediation is difficult to avoid.

“The easiest thing to do for clean soil sites [is] to put it on a truck and send it outside of the GTA [for Toronto projects] somewhere,” he says.

The province released “[Management of Excess Soil — A Guide for Best Management Practices](#)” in January 2014, but that appears not to have eased the congestion of soil-laden trucks headed from cities to rural landfills. But Manahan is optimistic that the proposed Excess Soil Management Policy Framework, released January 26, 2016, will do the trick.

“Directionally, this is a really good document,” he says.

The policy calls on generators of excess soil to play a greater role in the process. Generators would be responsible for preparing a soil management plan that would include characterizing the soil and identifying an appropriate receiving site. The plan would be verified by a third party “qualified person.” Without a soil management plan, a project might be denied approval to proceed.

Alongside the requirement for a plan would be a tool that would help link source sites with appropriate receiving sites. The United Kingdom’s CL:AIRE (Contaminated Land: Applications in Real Environments) model is frequently cited in the proposed framework. CL:AIRE is a Kijiji for soil, an online tool that helps connect source sites with appropriate receiving sites.

If it works, the new policy framework will cut infrastructure costs and have an impact on greenhouse gas emissions, says Manahan, as soils will no longer need to be trucked over great distances.

One potential roadblock though, are tipping fees. Manahan says Ontario's low tipping fees for excess soil may still make landfilling an economically attractive option for source sites, even under a new management framework. If Ontario wants to make disposal less attractive, it may have to make it more costly.

The [proposed Excess Soil Management Policy Framework](#) has been posted on the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights Registry for comment through March 26, 2016.