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Ontario Ministry of Environment working on excess soil management guidelines

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Ontario's environment ministry is currently consulting stakeholders, including construction, on soil management across the province.

With large amounts of soil being moved through activities like large-scale construction projects, Ontario's environment ministry (MOE) wants to establish best management practices (BMP) to guide the management of excess soils.

"It is the responsibility of all stakeholders who generate, haul or receive excess soil to ensure that the excess soil is being managed in an environmentally sound manner in accordance with all regulatory requirements," an MOE consultation document states.

Excess soil generated by excavation during construction that cannot be re-used at the site needs to be managed in a safe and efficient manner off-site. Maintaining a "healthy economy and healthy environment" is the main goal of managing excess soil in a sustainable manner, the ministry noted.

There also is a focus on soils generated from brownfield redevelopment projects taken to large-scale commercial fill operations, either directly or indirectly. The yet-to-be finalized BMP guidelines are not intended to apply to small-scale construction activities or construction activities at single-dwelling residential properties.

"The ministry recognizes the complex challenges that soil movement in the province pose to industry, the public and the environment, and the need for a policy framework to provide direction addressing these challenges," the ministry states.

Among the proposed best practices for source sites of excess soil are that all activities are overseen by a "Qualified Person" (QP) per Ontario regulations and that a soil-management plan has been developed.

This plan would include appropriate characterization of the site prior to soil excavation; site-plan requirements to identify locations and depth of soils to be excavated, along with soil volumes and chemical composition from specific areas of the site prior to excavation.

It would also include documentation signed by a QP with an appropriate and representative soil analysis for soils to be removed and confirmation that the soil quality is acceptable for the intended receiving site and consistent with its fill management plan.

The best practices for receiving sites include that all activities are overseen by a QP, and the establishment of pre-fill conditions at the site and public consultation prior to operations.

The development of a fill-management plan is proposed including applicable permits/zoning, appropriate soil quality parameters for soils to be received at the site; characterization and pre-approval of all source site locations prior to acceptance of any soil.

Among the proposed best practices for soil banks are a stormwater-management plan, dust-control plan and limits on stockpile heights based on site location and surrounding land-use. Groundwater monitoring for source-water protection areas or areas of potable groundwater would also be required.

Improved soil management could also be bolstered by proposed best practices in a project's procurement, the ministry noted. These guidelines would include recommending that municipalities, government ministries and agencies incorporate best soil management practices into the tendering process for large-scale construction projects.

The tender would include a requirement for a soil-management plan and that the receiving site is appropriate based on their fill-management plan.