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Ontario construction soil matching tool unveiled

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Finding the perfect match is easier than ever, when it comes to excess construction soils that is.

Supporting Ontario Infrastructure Investments and Lands (SOiIL) has launched a new website to fill a current void in the market where soils are currently being brought to the landfill instead of being used for other projects.

“It’s treating soil as a valued commodity, a resource, as opposed to a waste,” explained SOiIL project manager and administrator Alan Durand.

SOiIL was created by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO), which has developed best management practices (BMPs) for the construction industry on how to handle excess soils in Ontario. The report proposed the idea of a soil matching, in addition to a transparent process that produces a Materials Management Plan for the handling of non-waste excess soils tied to the remediation and/or development plans for the site involved. It also recommends the further development of recycling centres.

In Ontario there have been barriers to moving soil from one site to another. Some municipalities, like Clarington, Ont., will only accept fill that comes from within its boundaries in an effort to protect the quality of its soil and ground water. Durand hopes that a soil registry and soil matching website like SOiIL helps promote the use of BMPs that encourage excess construction soil beneficial reuse.

“The requirement to use BMPs should reduce and discourage inadvertent or intentional dumping of impacted soils at non approved locations due to the protocols covering the testing of soils, oversight by a qualified profession and use of a Material Management Plan, ensuring that materials are tracked and audited as to their final approved disposition,” he said.

The BMP was developed in consultation with the Ministry of Environment (MOE) and is intended to complement an expected MOE soils best management practices document.

Currently only soils associated with brownfield sites are regulated in Ontario.

The SOiIL website, soil registry and soil matching service are based on a system developed by the Contaminated Land: Applications in Real Environments (CL:AIRE) in the United Kingdom. Based on European experiences, Ontario needs to develop soil recycling centres, which can remove barriers to remediating impacted soil and returning the material to productive reuse saving and preserving virgin material feedstock, said Durand.

“Either clean soil can be stock piled or slightly impacted soil can be remediated and then be made available to be used. That’s what we don’t have in Ontario,” he said.

“To really make the system work, you need the capability and approval mechanism to put in place soil recycling centres.”

He added that it's a very contentious issue politically. Though there is currently a pilot underway in Waterloo Region and another pilot expected in the Peel Region.

Local soil recycling centres can allow developers and contractors on smaller projects to become involved with soil recycling.

"It's much easier to know they can get into one of these soil recycling centres at any time rather than wait to try and find a partner somewhere," said Durand. Right now SOiiL is spreading awareness and encouraging people to register in the database.

"Once you have a database and populate it with information, I think it'll be a bit of a valuable commodity and a commercial opportunity. But to get there it takes a lot of slogging, and that's where we're at right now," he said.

The website aims to match soils across the province, though Durand expects the majority of the service's first users will be in the Greater Toronto Area, due to the high volume of construction activity in the region.

SOiiL is also aiming to develop a map that will identify where sources of excess soil are located compared to those looking for soil.

For liability reasons, SOiiL does not guarantee the quality of the material, the volumes, or anything of that nature.

Durand believes municipalities will be a big beneficiary of the currently free service. He recently updated the Regional Public Works Commissioners of Ontario about SOiiL's work and its soil matching service.

Visit <http://soiil.com> for more information or to register for the soil matching service.