SUDBURY AREA RISK ASSESSMENT

CHAPTER 6.0
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROGRAM

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6.0 COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROGRAM

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Background

When the Sudbury Soils Study was initiated in 2001, a Technical Committee (TC) was formed to oversee and guide the study (also refer to Chapter 1.0 in this Volume). The TC recognized that a strong public consultation and communication effort was a key element to the overall success of the study. This chapter describes the organizational framework and key activities of the public communications and consultation program. Communication activities are ongoing and will continue after this report is finalized, so the events identified in this chapter will not represent the final or complete list of activities.

To assist with public consultation the TC formed a Communications Sub-committee and Public Advisory Committee. The Communications Sub-committee (CSC) has a mandate to oversee communications and consultation initiatives for the Sudbury Soils Study. This sub-committee is comprised of one communications professional from five of the six organizations represented on the TC, as well as one member from the Sudbury Area Risk Assessment (SARA) Group. Health Canada does not have a representative on this sub-committee. The duties of the Chair were rotated between members on a quarterly basis.

To represent the interests of the community, a Public Advisory Committee (PAC) was formed in 2002. This committee was made up of 10 – 12 volunteer residents from the Greater Sudbury Area, with two seats reserved for members of Whitefish Lake and Wahnapitae First Nation communities. The group was responsible for reviewing and providing comment on all communications materials for the study, and was updated on study progress at their bi-monthly meetings. Their critical role as a link between the scientists and the community helped provide an effective, comprehensive consultation process throughout the study.

6.1.2 Objectives of the Program

Public consultation and community participation were key elements of the communication effort throughout the Sudbury Soils Study. As part of this consultative approach to communication, a strong emphasis was placed on informing the community on the human health and ecological significance of the study findings.

The objectives of the consultation program were defined as follows:

1. To foster ongoing public awareness and increase understanding of the goals, objectives and results of the Sudbury Soils Study.

2. To provide regular opportunities for public consultation and community involvement.

3. To address questions and concerns from all stakeholders, including identified interest groups and individuals, community and public leaders, and the media.

4. To carry out the above communications in clear, concise language, and reiterate messages to ensure that they are incorporated into the community's common knowledge base.

5. To provide members of the public, residents of the communities of interest, and other stakeholders with timely and relevant information relating to technical findings in the Sudbury Soils Study, and the role of the SARA Group.

These objectives were achieved through the following efforts:

- Providing relevant and timely information concerning developments, findings and issues surrounding the Sudbury Soils Study.
- Using a variety of targeted communication vehicles that were accessible to a wide range of stakeholder groups.
- Ensuring communications efforts were proactive, timely, relevant, flexible and responsive.
- Encouraging media coverage of technical milestones, and public events.
- Integrating principles of risk communications in the development of tools and presentations for the public and the media.
- Demonstrating in tangible ways the work being undertaken by the SARA Group, *e.g.*, media interviews with field crews, photos in newsletters, at open houses, and on the project website.
- Anticipating and quickly responding to issues raised in the media and by the public.

6.2 Community Background

6.2.1 Community Profile

The City of Greater Sudbury was formed on January 1, 2001, as recommended by the *Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on Local Government Reform for Sudbury* (Thomas, 1999). The new City represents the amalgamation of the towns and cities which comprised the former Regional Municipality of Sudbury (Sudbury, Capreol, Nickel Centre, Onaping Falls, Rayside-Balfour, Valley East and Walden), as well as several unincorporated townships (Fraleck, Parkin, Aylmer, Mackelcan, Rathbun, Scadding, Dryden, Cleland and Dill).

Greater Sudbury is situated in the heart of northeastern Ontario, at the junction of the Trans Canada Highway, and Highways 69 South and 144 North. The total area of the City of Greater Sudbury is 3,627 square kilometres including many water bodies, making it the largest municipality in Ontario based on total area.

Sudbury functions as the service hub for northeastern Ontario - a market estimated at 550,000 people. While mining remains a major influence on the local economy, the City has diversified significantly in recent years to establish itself as a major centre of financial and business services, tourism, health care and research, education and government.

The largest employer in the region is Vale Inco. in Copper Cliff, which employs 4,500 people. Other major employers include the Sudbury Regional Hospital, the federal Sudbury Taxation Data Centre, municipal government and Xstrata Nickel. The unemployment rate is 8.5% (City of Greater Sudbury, 2005).

Sudbury is the main provider of health services in northeastern Ontario and has one hospital currently undergoing a multi-million dollar expansion. The Northeastern Ontario Regional Cancer Centre is also located in the study area.

Another important institutional feature found within the study area are schools, providing educational and recreational facilities for both local and area residents. There are 146 elementary and secondary schools under both public and separate school boards in the area. There are three post-secondary institutions: Laurentian University, Cambrian College, and Collège Boréal.

Based on the 2001 Census, the total population of the new City of Greater Sudbury was 155,219. The population has decreased since the last census in 1996. Approximately 5% of residents have aboriginal identity. Sudbury has the second largest francophone population of major cities in Canada located outside of Quebec, with over 28% of the population indicating French as their mother tongue and 40% of the population identified as bilingual.

6.2.2 Key Community Concerns

Members of the community raised several issues of concern during the course of the study. These issues were raised through a variety of communication channels including open houses, workshops, and through the website, telephone and email networks.

As in many projects concerning environmental risk, the primary concern for community members involved the health and well being of residents, particularly the children who reside in the study area.

Additional concerns were focused on property values, remediation of residential areas, occupational exposures, duration of the risk assessment process, general mining impacts (such as effects from treated mine effluent and slag), and the legacy of mining in the Greater Sudbury community.

In each case, concerns raised by the community were shared with all members of the study team, and responses were offered in a timely manner by the appropriate organization or stakeholder. In addition, new community concerns were recorded and the responses were incorporated in future communication vehicles. Answers were provided to the broader community through various channels including newsletters, websites, Q&A documents, media articles and study updates at public meetings.

Final results and study reports were made available to the community for their review, questions and comments.

6.3 Community Involvement and Consultation

6.3.1 Communications Sub-committee

The Communications Sub-committee (CSC) for the Sudbury Soils Study was created in 2002 to provide strategic communications support to the TC and the SARA Group. This committee was comprised of the senior communications representatives from each of the member organizations of the Technical Committee.

Responsibility for chairing the CSC meetings rotated quarterly through each of the member organizations. Meetings were held monthly, and as required throughout the course of the study. As part of its mandate, the CSC developed and reviewed the communications plan for the study, which was implemented by the SARA Group, and approved all public information and materials prior to dissemination in the community.

Communication efforts of the SARA Group were lead by Mr. Trevor Smith-Diggins. Dr. Christopher Wren of the SARA Group was the primary spokesperson for the study to the public.

6.3.2 Public Advisory Committee

In 2002, at the early stages of the Sudbury Soils Study, a Public Advisory Committee (PAC) was formed as a means of soliciting public input and providing a direct link between the study team and the community. The PAC was comprised of ten residents from the Greater Sudbury area. Area-wide advertisements were placed in local newspapers requesting applications to join the PAC. To become a member of the PAC, applicants had to be residents of the Greater Sudbury area, had to be available for

monthly volunteer meetings, and had to have an interest in local health and the environment. Each successful applicant then was interviewed by a panel comprised of one member of each of the TC member organizations, as well as the Chair and Vice-chair of the PAC. Once the PAC was established they selected their own members, however, original PAC members were selected by the TC as a whole. Names of the PAC members are listed in Appendix B.

The PAC played a vital role in the communications of scientific findings and study process to the community. PAC members assisted in development of communications materials, and reviewed communications documents developed by SARA and the CSC prior to public release.

Notice of bi-monthly PAC meetings was posted in the local media, inviting members of the public to attend. At each meeting community members had opportunities to present information or ask questions of the committee. Meetings were held at various locations within each ward of the City to provide the community with convenient access. Representatives of the TC and the Independent Process Observer also attended all PAC events and meetings.

Presentations by the SARA Group were provided at meeting to update members and attendees on study progress. Special presentations at select PAC meetings focused on specific aspects of the study, such as Risk Assessment and the HHRA model. Both scientific advisors to the TC for the study (Dr. Ron Brecher, HHRA and Dr. Stella Swanson, ERA) also made formal presentations to the PAC.

The Terms of Reference for the PAC are available on the study website www.sudburysoilsstudy.com.

6.3.3 Independent Process Observer

Mr. Franco Mariotti, Staff Scientist at Science North in Sudbury, was the Independent Process Observer (IPO) for the Sudbury Soils Study. The IPO played a critical role in the study and was responsible to oversee and report on the process used to conduct the HHRA and ERA, to ensure that decision making was transparent to the community and that public communication was timely and effective. The IPO also closely watched the TC to ensure that no one stakeholder unduly influenced the process or decisions.

The role of Independent Process Observer was outlined as follows:

- Acts as an impartial observer and recorder of the process;
- Is independent of any bureaucracy;
- Maintains the right to review information and files such as minutes of meetings, terms of reference, proposals, draft reports, and final reports pertaining to the HHRA/ERA process;
- Acts as an observer and where necessary as a facilitator to ensure that proper practice is followed with the Technical Committee and Public Advisory Committee;

- Receives comment/input/complaints from the public on matters relating to process and responds appropriately;
- Points out and suggest remedies for inconsistencies in procedures in consultation with committee members;
- Recommends process improvements to the Technical Committee and Public Advisory Committee to ensure effective and timely completion of work assignments, investigations, studies, and reporting;
- Suggests opportunities to improve the process for a more effective outcome for all parties;
- Prepares a quarterly written report on the overall progress and direction of the work of the committees for dissemination to the public; and,
- Encourages teamwork through consultation and communication.

The IPO successfully fulfilled this mandate, regularly attending TC and PAC meetings, as well as scientific sessions and reported back to the community in 20 (to date) IPO reports, which were mailed to 1100 contacts on the study mailing list, and posted on the study website. Copies of all these IPO reports are provided in Appendix B.

6.3.4 Communications Plan

At the onset of the study, it was determined by the TC and the CSC that a concrete, iterative Communications Plan was required to identify and track communications initiatives throughout the course of the study. This plan was developed by the CSC and the SARA Group, and reviewed and updated as the study progressed. Most of the activities outlined below have been implemented by the SARA Group, under the guidance of the TC and the CSC.

The Communications Plan incorporated the following initiatives:

- Publish regular reports to the community in the form of newspaper supplements issued twice a year;
- Continue to regularly update the study website, providing results and reports as they are released, as well as invitations and minutes from public meetings;
- Participate in individual and group meetings with interested parties who request additional information on the study and its possible outcomes;
- Conduct ongoing, proactive media relations, develop ‘op ed’ pieces (articles of interest to the community placed on the editorial page), and seek editorial board meetings as needed throughout the study process;
- Conduct open houses or public information sessions to describe study process to the community (June 2003, November 2003, February 2005);

- Research and monitor public opinion through a telephone survey of a representative number of Sudburians in fall 2004. Information from this survey was used to determine the effectiveness of communications initiatives to date, and was be used to improve efforts for the remainder of the study when clear, frequent communications will become most critical.
- Community information sessions are planned for 2008 to present the results of the HHRA and ERA;
- Issue regular news updates on SARA Group activities to members of the local media;
- Speak to community groups as requested;
- Conduct one-on-one meetings with key community opinion leaders to identify issues at an early stage and address them;
- Results of the HHRA will be presented at separate sessions in three of the communities of interest: Sudbury Centre, Copper Cliff and Falconbridge.

Methods for implementing these initiatives are presented in the following section.

6.4 Communications Initiatives

In order to keep the public informed of study developments, a number of communications initiatives were established. These activities continued throughout the course of the study. Timing of community activities is provided in the tables below.

6.4.1 Mailing List

A mailing list of interested local groups and individuals was created early in the Sudbury Soils Study process, and was regularly updated throughout the study. The final list comprised about 1100 contacts and included participants in the MOE soil and vegetable garden surveys conducted in 2001. This list was updated to include all participants in studies related to the Sudbury Soils Study. These studies include the Vegetable Garden Survey (2003), Indoor Dust Survey (2004), Drinking Water Survey (2005), and the Falconbridge Arsenic Exposure Study (2004). The list was also updated from participants at workshops or open houses.

Communications material produced during the study (Process Observer's reports and newsletters) were sent to all contacts on the mailing list. Confidential mailings containing specific survey results were sent to study participants that participated in specific surveys (*e.g.*, results for vegetable garden, indoor dust and drinking water surveys, *etc.*).

An email list was also compiled, with approximately 350 recipients. All notifications and invitations to meetings (open houses, TC and PAC meetings) were sent to this group.

6.4.2 Update Newsletter

A community newsletter, entitled *Update* was published by the SARA Group and distributed in the local *Northern Life* newspaper twice per year. Based on circulation statistics provided by the newspaper, *Update* was distributed to approximately 40,000 homes in the Greater Sudbury area. In addition, copies of the newsletter were mailed to the 1,100 residents on the SARA Group mailing list, and were also distributed to members of the Technical Committee to be made available at local government offices, schools, Science North, and other community venues.

Each issue of the newsletter contained updates on study progress, and results released from related projects within the study. As well, it provided a forum for focus on specific groups involved with the study. Groups and professional organizations profiled in the newsletter included:

- the PAC
- the TERA Group (responsible for the independent expert peer review process)
- the Technical Committee
- the SARA Group
- the Scientific Advisors to the TC.

The newsletter also featured a schedule of upcoming events, and contained contact information that allowed readers to provide comments directly to study team members.

Newsletters published over the course of the study were well-received by the community, and resulted in increased interest in the study, as evidenced by increased media attention and public feedback through phone and website enquiries. Numerous people attending open houses and calling or using the email address replied, when asked, that they had first learned about the study through the *Update* newsletters in *Northern Life*. Copies of all Update Newsletters are provided in Appendix B.

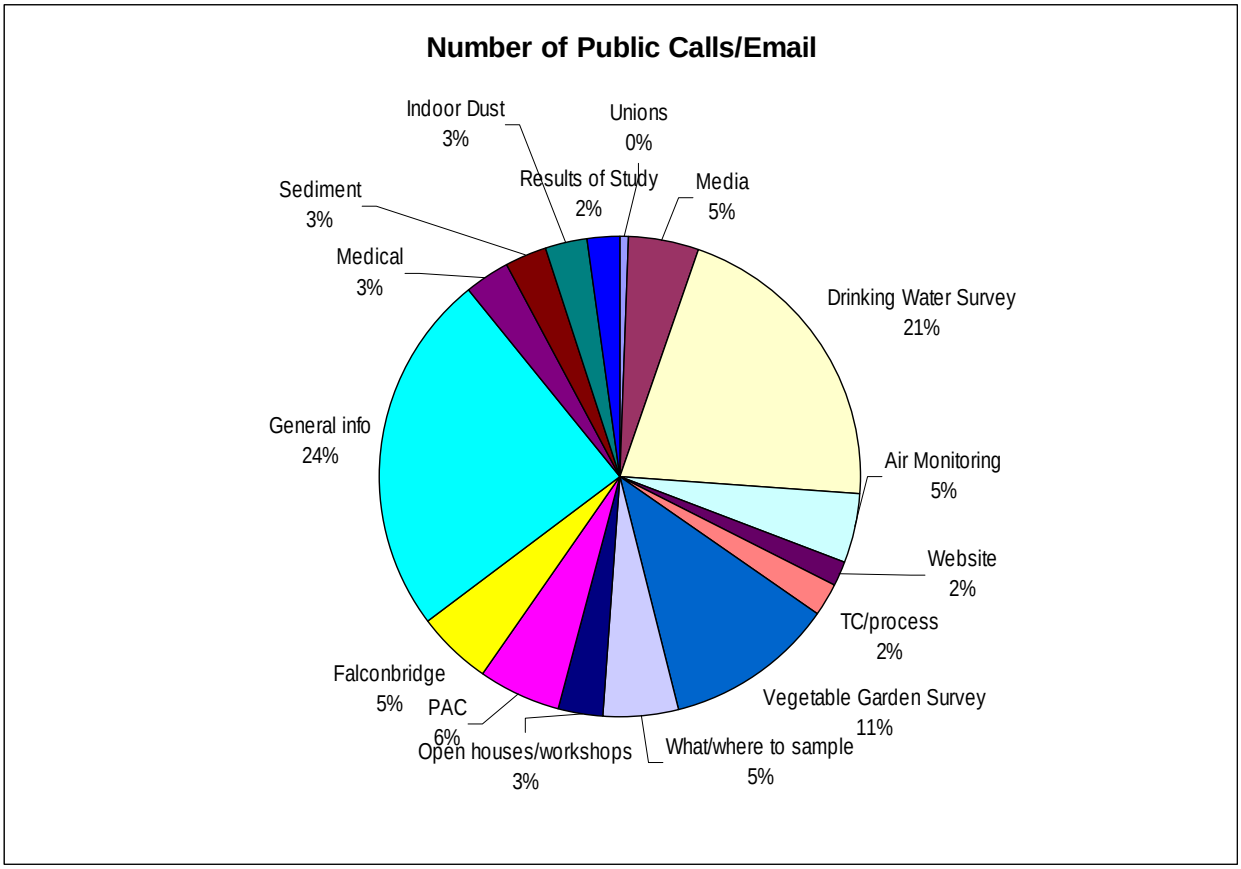
6.4.3 Project Website

The website for the Sudbury Soils Study (www.sudburysoilsstudy.com) was developed early in the study process (launched March 2003). The website provided general study information, as well as copies of all communications materials produced and distributed to the community (newsletters, Independent Process Observer's reports, news releases, articles, frequently asked questions, and related links). This online information repository also provided an archive of PAC meeting minutes and details from community open houses and workshops. Notices of future PAC and TC meetings were provided as pop-up windows on the home page. The site also provided contact information for the study team, and an email link for direct contact.

Results and final reports were posted on the website as they became available.

6.4.4 Toll Free Phone Line and Email

A toll-free phone line and email address were set up at the beginning of the project, with contact details provided in all communications materials produced during the study. The email address was directly linked to the study website. Approximately 470 calls or emails were received between January 2003 and December 2007. The topic of each call was logged according to the categories provided below (with some overlap). All calls were answered by a member of the SARA Group within 24 hours, with information provided as needed.



6.4.5 Independent Process Observer's Reports

As mentioned previously, the Independent Process Observer, Franco Mariotti, prepared quarterly Process Observer's Reports, which were mailed to 1,000 residences. A total of 20 reports have been distributed to date and this will continue until the completion of the study and release of final results to the community.

6.4.6 Physicians Package

As part of the study's commitment to providing timely and relevant information to the Sudbury community, a package of medical information related to the six Chemicals of Concern (arsenic, cobalt, copper, nickel, lead, and selenium) was provided to all physicians, nurses and health care providers in the Sudbury area. This document was prepared in consultation with Dr. Lesbia Smith, the SARA Group's medical advisor, as well as the medical directors from Vale Inco and Xstrata Nickel (Drs. Bob Francis and Gord Hall, respectively), and the Sudbury & District Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Penny Sutcliffe.

Doctors were invited to review the information provided, and contact the SARA Group with any questions or concerns. Information updates were also provided in *The Advisory*, a quarterly newsletter produced by the Sudbury & District Health Unit and mailed to health care providers within the health unit's catchment area (which includes all members of the health and medical community within the study area).

6.4.7 Individual and Group Meetings

Meetings with stakeholders, community groups, and other interested parties were initiated by the study team, to provide information and solicit feedback from individuals with local knowledge and experience. SARA Group and Technical Committee members participated in the following meetings over the course of the study:

- Communications Sub-committee
- Technical Committee (monthly beginning 2001)
- Public Advisory Committee (bimonthly beginning 2003)
- Local interest groups (19+ meetings)
- First Nations (11 meetings)

Details and dates of the various meetings are provided in Appendix B.

The study group also conducted three workshops and four community open house/information sessions between 2003-2005. All information and feedback collected during these meetings was used to inform the study team and make improvements to the Sudbury Soils Study.

6.4.8 Media Relations

The local Sudbury media has shown significant interest in the study, conducting more than 50 interviews with team members, and publishing or airing more than 150 media pieces directly related to the Sudbury Soils Study. These are listed in Appendix B.

6.4.9 "Have Your Say" Workshops

Three "Have Your Say" workshops were held in the communities of Copper Cliff, Coniston and Falconbridge on May 13, 14 and 15, 2003. The purpose of these workshops was to obtain information from community members on their goals and expectations for the study, and to use this information to frame the future path of study progress. In particular, input was solicited for selection of valued ecosystem components (VECs) for the ERA. Meetings were well advertised in the local media, and invitation letters were mailed to approximately 400 people living in the smelter communities. Over the course of three evenings, a total of 115 people attended the meetings. Attendees were then asked to form smaller 'breakout' groups to provide input on three main topic areas:

1. Local recreation and environmental priorities – *e.g.*, camping, canoeing, hiking, swimming, forest recovery, wildlife population health
2. Local food – *e.g.*, gardening, market gardens
3. Local hunting, fishing and trapping.

Through these workshops, the study team received detailed input from the community on specific plants, animals and natural areas that they believed should receive special attention in the Sudbury Soils Study. Participants expressed the importance of the links between the areas of specific attention for the study and human health, including drinking water, edible foods from natural areas, and recreation – particularly where children play. Participants also expressed concern about biodiversity and economic impacts on tourism, as well as concern about the health of family pets.

6.4.10 Open Houses

Between 2002 to 2005, four community information sessions were conducted to discuss results and process of the Sudbury Soils Study. At all four meetings, attendees were given the opportunity to review a number of displays providing information on the study. In addition, community members were given an opportunity to speak with scientists and other members of the study team directly responsible for conducting the study. A brief, formal presentation also allowed for sharing of information, and was followed by a facilitated question and answer session.

The first public open house was held on July 31, 2002, before the SARA Group became involved in the study. A number of local citizens turned out to hear a presentation from Independent Process Observer Franco Mariotti, and to meet with members of the Technical and Public Advisory Committees. Information was presented regarding the selection of technical consultants, and specific tasks that would be presented for the study team to complete.

The second open house was held on June 11, 2003, in the Inco Cavern at Science North, Sudbury. A total of 68 people attended the meeting, which was held from 3:00-9:00 pm. Seventeen of these attendees completed exit questionnaires upon leaving the meeting. A review of this feedback identified six key issues concerning:

- Health, primarily of children;
- Potential for increased exposure to metals from eating garden vegetables;
- The health of the recovering ecosystem in the Sudbury area;
- The complexity of the risk assessment process and the concern that it might show inconclusive results;
- Need for additional information and clarification about how the study process works, and the role of the various groups on the Technical Committee; and,
- Need for additional opportunities to hear directly from the researchers on study progress.

The third open house was held on November 25, 2003, again in the Inco Cavern of Science North. A total of 87 people attended the open house, and were provided with study updates and details of on-going work, such as the vegetable garden and air monitoring surveys. Twenty-one of these attendees completed questionnaires. The majority of responses were positive with respect to the study process, and most responders agreed that current undertakings in the human health and ecological risk assessments would respond to all of their concerns. Other issues raised included concerns related to:

- Water quality in the Sudbury area;
- Interest in testing humans for metal levels as part of the human health risk assessment;
- Including alternative health practitioners and natural detoxification through methods such as chelation in the study; and,
- Potential occupational exposures and economic effects, most specifically of decreased property values in the Sudbury area.

The fourth open house was held on February 9, 2005, at the Inco Cavern of Science North. A total of 25 people attended the meeting, with 10 completing exit questionnaires. Concerns expressed focused on the volume and nature of the presentation format. Most felt that more information needed to be disclosed to

the community, and one attendee questioned the design of the study as a whole. These concerns were taken under advisement by the TC and PAC.

6.4.11 Telephone Survey

The purpose of conducting a telephone survey was to contact a representative number of Sudburians, to research and monitor public opinion of the study. Information from this survey was used to determine the effectiveness of communications initiatives to date, and improve efforts for the remainder of the study.

A total of 606 residences participated in the survey, conducted in the fall of 2004. Each household was asked if they would like to participate, and if they agreed, the survey was administered. Of those who participated, 32% stated that they had heard of the Sudbury Soils Study. Of those who had awareness of the study, 30% stated that they had a clear idea of what the study was examining, and 83% correctly identified the statement that most closely represented the intent of the study, while 67% of respondents suggested that there wasn't enough information being communicated to the public, 24% suggested there was nothing further the study team could do to encourage them to participate.

This survey provided a solid benchmark to evaluate the effectiveness of communications efforts at the half-way point in the communications program. Based on this survey, the study team continued with its ongoing initiatives. Modifications included more media invitations to meetings (through public service announcements and television ads), and increased efforts to inform school-aged children about the study, with a presentation on the study and possible links to curriculum made to the science teachers of the Rainbow District School Board in April 2005.

6.5 Conclusion

Input provided by the community helped the SARA Group and the Technical Committee shape the study and the manner in which results were communicated to the community. In particular, the study has:

1. Devoted special attention to the health of children;

2. Undertaken a vegetable garden survey, a drinking water survey, and an indoor dust survey to address community concerns regarding direct contact with metals and potential health impacts;

3. As a result of stakeholder input with members of Laurentian University, the City and other special interest groups, taken a more detailed evaluation of the links between biodiversity, the recovering vegetation ecosystems and metals in the soil;

4. Endeavoured to communicate results clearly and professionally, in a manner that is easily understood;

5. Incorporated specific valued ecosystem components (*i.e.*, blueberries) into the ecological risk assessment as a direct result of stakeholder input;

6. Been conducted in a transparent manner to assure community members that the results are unbiased as well as conclusive; and,

7. Made an increased effort to provide additional opportunities for public consultation, including workshops and information sessions.

Comprehensive communications and feedback received from the community has contributed to a better study overall, and we continue to provide information on study results and findings to the community.

6.6 References

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