



The Sudbury Soils Study: A Commentary
By
The Public Advisory Committee for the Study
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SUMMARY

The Sudbury Soils Study commenced in 2001 following recommendations by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) that a more detailed soil study be undertaken to fill data gaps and both a human health risk assessment (HHRA) and ecological risk assessment (ERA) be undertaken. The recommendations came from the results of the 2001 MOE report that identified areas in Sudbury where some metal concentrations exceeded the generic Ontario soil quality guidelines. Vale Inco and Xstrata Nickel agreed to fund the study and a partnership was put in place to oversee the project. This partnership included the Ministry of the Environment (MOE), Vale Inco, the Sudbury & District Health Unit, Xstrata Nickel, the City of Greater Sudbury and the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada. Through an open bidding process the partnership contracted the Sudbury Area Risk Assessment (SARA) Group to execute the project with oversight provided by a Technical Committee (TC) formed by the partnership.

The Public Advisory Committee (PAC) was created in 2002 to provide a window to the study for the public. The PAC was also established to address the concerns of the community at large, by providing comments and input to the TC on deliberations surrounding the activities assessing the health and environmental impacts of metals in the Sudbury environment. From the Terms of Reference, study activities upon which the PAC might offer commentary included:

- sampling and reporting of community soil metal levels;
- development and implementation of community HHRA/ERA studies;
- initiation of any remedial works recommended by the conclusions of the HHRA/ERA studies; and
- all associated public communication and consultation activities.

The PAC was not responsible for the scientific or technical aspects of the study.

By the time the study concluded in late 2009, the PAC will have held 40 public meetings that allowed the public to hear technical presentations on the study, ask questions and make representations as desired. Meetings were held in several City Wards to allow greater access. These meetings resulted in numerous recommendations to the TC that were designed to enhance public awareness of the study and provide for greater transparency of the process. Some technical recommendations were also made to the TC by members of the PAC. The PAC's work was complementary to that of an Independent Process Observer who was appointed to ensure transparency of the process and that the interests of the public in the study area were served.

The main findings reached by PAC on the Sudbury Soils Study are listed below:

- The MOE created the mandate for the project. MOE has clearly stated that this mandate has been met. PAC observed that all study principals, both scientific advisors and both independent expert review panels agreed that the study has been completed to meet the mandate of the project.
- It was encouraging that several different stakeholders came together to produce an excellent study and a model process for future studies. While it seems likely that not every stakeholder's interests were fully met, a sufficient and meaningful study did emerge through consensus to the benefit of all citizens of the study area. Collectively, stakeholders were motivated to ensure that the study correctly assessed the risk to human health and to the ecology of the study area.
- PAC believes that the science carried out by the SARA Group for the Sudbury Soils Study was exceptional and that the use of independent scientific advisors served to strengthen the scientific rigour of the study.
- The opinion of the PAC is that the use of independent expert review panels for both risk assessments provided additional quality control and transparency.
- The Independent Process Observer completed his task in an exceptional manner that served to strengthen the validity and transparency of the process.
- Opportunities for public involvement were numerous and varied, but not always well-attended. Comments and questions from members of the public helped to improve many aspects of the study.
- The PAC kept its focus on the underlying objective of the committee, which was to assist the TC, SARA Group and the public in understanding the issues with the goal of producing a scientifically sound study that respected the needs of all concerned and rigorously addressed the scientific and regulatory issues.
- Finally PAC believes it has been a beneficial asset to the study and that the public has been well served by volunteer members of the PAC.

For the full PAC report, please visit the website at www.sudburysoilsstudy.com.