

Independent Process Observer



Sudbury Soils Study | Étude des sols sudburois
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Quarterly Report

REPORT #12

May – June, 2005

By Franco Mariotti

Three and a half years ago, I assumed my role as the Independent Process Observer for the Sudbury Soils Study. At this time next year, if all goes according to plan, it is expected that the Sudbury Soils Study (SSS) will be finished.

Recently the Technical Committee (TC) of the Sudbury Soils Study approved a draft schedule for the review and release of the scientific reports to the public in June, 2006. The schedule will be posted on the Sudbury Soils Study website. It should be understood that viewing of the final Human Health Risk Assessment and Ecological Risk Assessment reports by the public will be contingent on the recommendations of the International Expert Review Panel (IERP).

Normally my reports provide an update for a three month period. Since my last report covered four months, this 12th report covers only two months, May and June, 2005. Subsequent reports will return to the normal three month period.

Independent Process Observer reports are divided into two sections. The first section, "*Past Issues and Recommendations*," is intended to be an update on matters previously discussed but not finalized. The second section, "*Current Issues and Recommendations*," deals with any new issues that have arisen since my last report.

PAST ISSUES and RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ISSUE: There have been no presentations and/or comments made by a member of the public at TC meetings for over a year. What more could the TC do to encourage public presentations at their meetings?

In my last report, I made the following recommendation: "The TC should advertise their willingness to accommodate members of the public wishing to make a presentation at a TC meeting. This should be done on the Sudbury Soils Study website and in the newsletter **UPDATE** as soon as possible."

The process observer for the Sudbury Soils Study is independent of any organization or group involved in the study. He is impartial and his role is to advise on matters related to the study's Human Health Risk Assessment and Ecological Risk Assessment processes, both of which are managed by the study's Technical Committee with input from the Public Advisory Committee. As the observer, Franco Mariotti is required to report to the public on the study process four times each year.

RESULT: The TC has responded to my recommendation by informing potential presenters or commenters that the TC will continue to accommodate requests for presentations during the one hour morning period at each TC meeting. The TC will also attempt to accommodate special requests for a presentation from the public outside of the dedicated period. This information has been updated in both the newsletter and on the SSS website.

2. ISSUE: Public Advisory Committee's (PAC) commitment to have at least one PAC meeting in every ward in the City of Greater Sudbury.

RESULT: In June the PAC was supposed to hold its public meeting in Val Caron, the only ward that had not yet hosted a PAC meeting. However, due to the lack of availability of a meeting venue, the PAC held that meeting in a central location at Science North. The TC and PAC have decided to have the remaining PAC meetings in the Gold Room at Science North. When the final Human Health Risk Assessment and Ecological Risk Assessment reports are released to the public, a community information session will occur at a location central to all residents of the City of Greater Sudbury.

COMMENT: This is a positive step. Now that a central location for the remainder of this year's PAC meetings has been confirmed, there is the potential to attract more people, increasing attendance.

3. ISSUE: More frequent updating of the Sudbury Soils Study website.

In Report #11, I made the following recommendation: "The announcement of future PAC and TC meetings should be placed on the website immediately following each meeting. As well, a summary of TC decisions and discussions should be on the website within two weeks of deliberations."

RESULT: To date this has not happened.

COMMENT: The Sudbury Soils Study website is the most consistent mechanism for informing the public of scheduled meeting dates as well as the current status of the study. With one year remaining in this study, it is more important than ever for the public to be aware of meeting dates, as this will be their last opportunity for input at TC and PAC meetings.

RECOMMENDATION: I urge the TC to ensure that a calendar of upcoming meetings for both the TC and the PAC (at least those meetings scheduled till the end of this year) be posted on the website as soon as possible. Furthermore, an announcement of the next meeting should appear on the screen as soon as one enters the Sudbury Soils Study website. This latter approach has been attempted successfully before and needs to be done in a consistent and sustained manner.

4. ISSUE: The TC agreed to post a synopsis of decisions made at TC meetings on the Sudbury Soils Study website.

COMMENT: To date this has not happened. This recommendation was made in direct response to concerns expressed by members of the public that the minutes of the TC meetings should be publicized. (See PO Report #11).

RECOMMENDATION: I urge the TC to ensure that this happens as soon as possible. This action is an essential part of maintaining a transparent process for the Sudbury Soils Study.

5. ISSUE: In the Independent Process Observer Report #8 published one year ago, I expressed concern that Health Canada's representative was not always present at TC meetings. As a result I asked the TC to clarify Health Canada's role as a member of the TC.

RESULT: Discussions were held between the TC and Health Canada to determine exactly what role Health Canada has in the Sudbury Soils Study. It was clarified at the TC meeting held June 9th this year that Health Canada is indeed a full member of the TC. They are there to be made aware of issues that may impact on health concerns of First Nations people.

Nevertheless, TC decisions are made irrespective of Health Canada's presence at a TC meeting. Minutes of TC meetings and any reports produced by the Sudbury Soils Study are forwarded electronically to Health Canada's representative to keep them fully informed.

COMMENT: Decisions at TC meetings are reached by consensus of all TC members. Members include the Sudbury and District Health Unit, the Ministry of the Environment, the City of Greater Sudbury, INCO Ltd., Falconbridge Ltd. and Health Canada. As previously stated, decisions are made with or without Health Canada's presence; however, decisions cannot be made if one of the other five members is absent.

I have no concern with this specific arrangement; my concern is with Health Canada's sporadic attendance at TC meetings as the representative for native health issues. Although minutes of TC meetings and reports are passed on to Health Canada officials, meeting minutes do not always capture specifics of discussions held. If the Health Canada representative is not in attendance at a particular TC meeting, obviously issues around native health concerns will not be raised at that meeting. It is reassuring, though, that the SARA Group has maintained consistent contact with both First Nations groups, offering comprehensive study updates and opportunities for First Nations members to participate in various studies as part of the larger SSS. However, my concern as a Process Observer is: Are native health concerns truly represented if a Health Canada representative is not always at TC meetings?

CURRENT ISSUES and RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ISSUE: Low public attendance at PAC meetings.

COMMENT: The PAC has suggested that newspaper advertisements for upcoming meetings be themed in order to foster public interest in their meetings and hopefully increase attendance. In other words, the advertisement should include, along with the location and time of the PAC meeting, topics for discussion. I recommend that advertisements be extended beyond the three local papers to include Sudbury's radio stations and the Cable 10 television channel.

RECOMMENDATION: I support these suggestions and encourage the TC to implement them for the next PAC meeting in September.

2. ISSUE: PAC members asked the TC if they could be financially reimbursed for their mileage to and from Sudbury Soils Study meetings as well as for computer paper and ink usage related to this study.

COMMENT: There are several issues here that should be noted when considering this request. At the beginning of this study, the PAC was supposed to meet once every three months in the same location. However, the demands of the Sudbury Soils Study necessitated more frequent PAC meetings and attendance at additional open houses and public forums. As a result the PAC now meets monthly and in addition, has met in almost every city ward, resulting in accumulation of considerable mileage by members. Some PAC members have resigned, perhaps in part, because of their increasing personal expenses due to their involvement in this study.

Reimbursement of PAC members might be seen as buying them off by some members of the public. However, other institutions and ministries have policies for volunteer reimbursement, so there are precedents. The amount of mileage used and paper printed by a PAC member on an annual basis is a considerable out-of-pocket expense.

RESULT: At the June meeting, the TC positively responded to the request to reimburse PAC members for their out-of-pocket expenses with reimbursement starting in June of 2004. I personally support the PAC's request for reimbursement and compliment the TC for their sensitivity in responding to PAC members' concerns.

FUTURE MEETING SCHEDULES:

Technical Committee Meetings **Provincial Tower, Boardrooms C and D** **Tom Davies Square**

- August 11
- September 8
- October 13
- November 10
- December 8

Public Advisory Committee Meetings **Science North, Gold Room**

- September 20, 2005
- November 15, 2005

If you have any questions regarding the Sudbury Soils Study, please contact our toll free number – (866) 315-0228 or e-mail questions@sudburysoilstudy.com