

Northern Life (online)

2/9/2004

Soil study group opens process to residents

The Sudbury Soil Study is taking new steps to ensure residents of Sudbury can trust both the process by which the work is carried out and the final conclusions.

"We're trying to open up the whole process to Sudburians," said Brian McMahon of the local office of the Ministry of the Environment, who sits on the Technical Committee.

Franco Mariotti, the independent process observer, addressed these concerns in his latest report and also at the Tuesday night meeting of the Public Advisory Committee (PAC) at Cambrian College.

Mariotti's report first noted the request by local mining unions for representation on the Technical Committee (TC), the decision making body comprised of government and industry representative, and the PAC.

"My observation was that this face-to-face conversation was beneficial to all sides and I congratulate the Chair and all who participated in creating a positive atmosphere that led to fruitful discussions," said Mariotti.

Regarding the unions' participation on PAC, some study members voiced their concern about too many groups coming forward and bogging down the work of the committee.

However Homer Seguin, a retired Inco employee, stated mining locals represent thousands of Sudbury residents, both working and retired.

They have legitimate concerns about workplace exposure to heavy metals and can bring their own expertise to the process.

However, others, including Dr. Chris Wren of the SARA Group, responsible for the scientific data collection, disagreed.

He gathered support from other members when he said he thought the work of the group should be broader than that.

"While occupational exposure is an important issue I don't agree the Sudbury Soil Study is the vehicle, we do not have that kind of expertise," said McMahon, who agreed with Wren.

Pat Thompson, manager of Inco's Environment, Health and Safety department, also disagreed with Seguin.

"Inco and the Steelworkers' union local have a joint committee that is in place as part of the collective agreement and that has already done epidemiological studies," he said.

Both are collaborating with the Northeastern Ontario Regional Cancer Centre to undertake studies in mortality and cancer rates at their operations.

Next meeting of the Public Advisory Committee is March 16, fourth floor of Cambrian College in the Koski Center at 6:30 pm.

The Technical Committee meeting meets every second Thursday and welcomes public presentations from 9 to 10 am in C-11 at Tom Davies Square.

"Phone Ivon Filion two weeks ahead though at 566-8101 ext. 7909," said McMahon.

For more information visit www.sudburysoilstudy.com.

- By Bill Bradley