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Home-grown food ok tests show

Sudbury garden produce remains safe to eat according to preliminary results from tests done last summer.

"So far we've seen nothing alarming in the vegetables or in the garden soils themselves," said Chris Wren of the SARA Group.

The SARA Group is testing local garden produce and soils in the Sudbury area.

Wren spoke at the Sudbury Restoration Workshop held Wednesday and Thursday at Laurentian University.

The workshop involved several presentations about improving water quality in local lakes but addressed new concerns about heavy metal contamination in soils.

Garden produce and soils were tested for heavy metal concentrations. Lettuce is showing higher concentrations of heavy metals, such as copper and nickel than root crops such as carrots or potatoes, but that does not mean they are toxic according to Wren.

"It's just a function of their particular biology, how they store the metals," said Wren.

"We're very encouraged by the results because they provide a good snapshot of what people are eating in the area," he said.

"So far we've seen nothing that are alarming in the vegetables or in the garden soils themselves."

In fact, metal concentration values in the gardens tend to be lower than those found in people's front yards, he said.

So far, because the preliminary results are not worrisome, no participant has been contacted.

"Anybody who participated in the garden survey will be individually given their results this spring," said Wren.

All the results will be gathered together and released later as part of the Sudbury Soil Study in late 2004 or 2005.

The vegetable garden study looked at 64 residential gardens, 15 commercial grower operations mostly in the Valley and 10 wild sites spread all over the city.

A minimum of three vegetables were tested per site, ranging from root crops, to tomatoes and leafy crops. Results of metal accumulations differed by vegetable group. Copper found in lettuce for example ranged up to three times the values for carrots.

For information visit www.sudburysoilstudy.com.

—Bill Bradley