

Unions belong on committee: group

**Sudbury Labour
Council wants
representatives from
Steelworkers, CAW on
soils study committee**

By Carol Mulligan
THE SUDBURY STAR

The Sudbury and District Labour Council is demanding full memberships for the city's two biggest trade unions on the technical committee for the Sudbury Soils Study.

The three-year, \$5-million study to measure the level of contamination of toxic metals in Sudbury soils and assess their health risks has come under fire by union representatives and other critics who question the study's credibility.

Sudbury's mining giants Inco and Falconbridge Ltd., are funding the study and also occupy two of six seats on the technical committee.

The technical committee will eventually make recommendations to the Ministry of the Environment — which called for the study and dictated the mining companies should pay for it — on how contaminated soils should be remediated if such action is required.

Critics have questioned how the study can be unbiased — or even appear to be that way — when the two largest polluters in the city are funding the study and voting on its outcomes.

The labour council passed a motion last week unanimously call-

ing for representatives of United Steelworkers of America Locals 6500 and 2020 and Mine Mill Local 598/Canadian Autoworkers to be voting members on the technical committee.

There is also a public advisory committee to the study, as well as an independent process observer charged with ensuring the study is conducted properly.

While some concessions have been made to give unions input into the study in an advisory capacity, the technical committee has resisted giving the Steelworkers and the CAW any kind of official say.

Sandy Bass, president of the Sudbury and District Labour Council, said the motion demands Steelworkers and the CAW be given "full-fledged voting seats" on the technical committee.

It is also demanding that technical committee meetings be open to the public and media. The "secret meetings" must end, the council says in its motion.

Technical committee members have argued that the meetings were held in-camera because the material being dealt with was too complicated for the average person to understand.

Bowing to public pressure, the committee has relented and invited the unions to observe the meetings, but not to participate in them.

And now it appears the public will be able to attend those sessions as well.

The SARA Group, which is conducting the Sudbury Soils Study, recently issued a notice inviting the public to make submissions or pre-

INPUT SOUGHT

The public is invited to make submissions or presentations to the Sudbury Soils Study's technical committee:

■ **Why** — To share your point of view and concerns about the study and make sure committee members hear them first-hand;

■ **When** — March 11 and April 8, from 9:30-10:30 a.m.;

■ **Where** — Room C-11, Tom Davies Square, 200 Brady Street;

■ **How** — Contact Ivan Filion, chairman of the study's public advisory committee, at 566-8181, ext. 7909; If you have questions, visit www.sudburysoilsstudy.com or phone 1-866-315-0228.

sentations to the technical committee, providing people contact the chairman of the public advisory committee two weeks before the meetings.

Bass said the labour council believes the mining unions, which represent "thousands of high-risk members past and present and retirees," should have full membership on the committee and play an "integral part" in the study.

The Sudbury Soils Study is important to the community and adding union members to its technical committee would enhance the "system of checks and balances" and make for a "very honest report," said Bass.

He said he understands why committees, when they are beginning their work, might want to meet in

private.

"I've been on lots of committees," says the former president of the Sudbury local of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

If meetings are open to the public too soon, committee members can become "overwhelmed and bogged down," Bass said.

But now that thousands of soil samples have been gathered and the technical committee is operating smoothly, it's "imperative" that the committee bring in the unions now, he said.

Homer Seguin, a retired Steelworker and union activist with decades of experience in health and safety issues, was gratified the labour council supported the motion — to a person — that he proposed.

"This study has got to be done right or else it's a snow job," said Seguin.

If unions don't participate as full members, "if they have no say and no vote, that detracts" from the importance of the study, said Seguin.

Unless the unions are given full memberships, Seguin said he fears the technical committee is "using" the union representatives who are observing meetings.

"They're using them to give total legitimacy to the process when they're not giving them total rights."

The other full members of the technical committee are the Ministry of the Environment, the Sudbury and District Health Unit, the City of Greater Sudbury and Health Canada.