

Water not tested for nickel

Woman wants the Sudbury Soils Study to look into it

By Carol Mulligan
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Pat Reed can't figure it out and she's asking the Sudbury Soils Study to look into it.

The New Sudbury woman is puzzled as to why Sudbury's drinking water isn't tested for the presence of nickel, as it is for other minerals of concern such as copper and lead.

"I find it so strange, that in the nickel capital of the world," drinking water isn't regularly tested for traces of the mineral that's in such abundance in Sudbury, said Reed.

Reed attended the public session of the Sudbury Soils Study's technical committee Thursday at Tom Davies Square.

Rick Grylls, president of Mine Mill Local 598/CAW, who attended the meeting representing labour's interests in the soils study, brought her concern to the committee.

The Sudbury Soils Study is a three-year, \$5-million study recommended by the Ministry of the Environment to test levels of toxic metals in soil, assess their risk on human health and recommend ways in which contaminated soils might be remediated.

Nickel giants Inco and Falconbridge Ltd. are paying for the study.

"Mrs. Reed has two little girls who are very sick, and she's starting to feel it's metal poisoning," Grylls told the committee.

In an interview after the meeting, Reed didn't wish to talk about her family's medical concerns.

She said she was looking for information on the effect nickel might have on immune system disorders when she learned Sudbury's drinking water isn't tested for the mineral.

Reed said research she has obtained shows that Sudbury has the highest level of nickel in its drinking water in the world.

The information also says that nickel can be a carcinogen or cancer-causing agent.

Reed's information comes from

the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Brian McMahon, of the Ministry of the Environment's Sudbury Soils and SO₂ Assessment Program, said municipalities aren't required to test for nickel in water.

Compound effect

However, the ministry does occasionally do extra testing through its Drinking Water Surveillance Program, which is conducted on a provincial level, and nickel is one of the minerals looked for in that program.

Grylls told the committee that Reed was worried about the fact the nickel level in water, when added to nickel in the soil and air, might compound the risk of exposure to the mineral.

McMahon said it doesn't come as a surprise to the ministry that "nickel issues in water" would be raised as part of the study. He said the matter would be evaluated as part of the risk assessment of the study.

Reed told the committee the ques-

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tion is, should nickel be one of the "regulated substances" tested for in drinking water.

She said she would like to see the ministry regular test for nickel in drinking water.

And, if "parameters" for acceptable levels of the metal of concern are to be established, it should be done in Sudbury where nickel levels are high.

"We should be the ones to set them," Reed said.

Reed also asked the technical committee about the amount of advice it was receiving from medical doctors about the risks of metals of concern.

John Hogenbirk, vice-chairman of the Sudbury Soils Study's public advisory committee, told Reed his committee would find out about that and urged her to attend the PAC's next meeting.

The public advisory committee will meet March 16 at 6:30 p.m. at Cambrian College's Koski Centre.

For more information about the Sudbury Soils Study, visit the website at www.sudburysoilsstudy.com or phone 1-866-315-0228.