

Sudbury Soils Study nearing completion

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The Sudbury Soils Study won't be a document that sits on a shelf collecting dust, says Stephen Monet.

It will give Sudburians some of the answers we've been seeking about the human health and environmental risks associated with living in a mining town.

The five-year, \$5-million study moved a step closer to the finish line last week with the visit to Sudbury of the team that will select scientific experts to review the study's findings.

The Toxicology Excellence in Risk Assessment (TERA) Group toured Sudbury and met with members of the two committees involved in the study — the decision-making technical committee and the public advisory committee.

TERA is a non-profit, charitable organization from Cincinnati, Ohio, whose mission is to protect public health. It has been hired to select members for the Independent Expert Review Panel that will review the final report from the Sudbury Soils Study.

Monet, manager of environmental initiatives with the City of Greater Sudbury, said the study is meant to answer questions about metal contamination in our soil and air, and their impact on our health.

"It's not going to be a cop-out — not this time," Monet said at a meeting of the Sudbury Soils Study's technical and public advisory committees.

Monet is a member of the technical committee, whose members also come from Inco and Falconbridge, the Ministry of the Environment, the Sudbury and District Health Unit, and the First Nation and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada.

The technical committee hired a group of consultants called the Sudbury Area Risk Assessment (SARA) Group to conduct thousands of soil, air, water, wildlife and vegetation samples for analysis and conduct the human health and environmental risk assessments.

Based on those assessments, recommendations will be made on how to remediate contaminated soils if necessary.

The Sudbury Soils Study was recommended by the Ministry of the Environment after its testing showed higher than average levels of metal contamination in Sudbury soils. The cost of it is being paid by Inco and Falconbridge.

Jacqueline Patterson, TERA review program manager, said scientists will be recruited for the panel for a "very intense" two or three days of review of the study's final report.

She and her colleagues are "impressed and intrigued" by the study's process.

THE FINAL CHAPTER

■ The Sudbury Soils Study is moving into its final chapter — the risk assessment phase. When it's complete, there will be a clear indication of the impact mining has had on human and environmental health.

■ Final results of the risk assessments are expected to be released in 2006.