

Sudbury Soils Study the focus of Swedish mining conference

The Sudbury Soils Study is regarded as the most comprehensive investigation of its kind ever conducted in Canada. Now, Sudbury is setting an example on the international stage for other mining communities to follow.

This summer, members of the Sudbury Soils Study team travelled to Sweden to present an overview of the human health and ecological risk assessments at an international conference focusing on mining and the environment.

Securing the Future — 2005 was held in Skelleftea, about 800 km north of Stockholm. Due to its latitude — just 200 km south of the Arctic Circle — Skelleftea is truly in the land of the midnight sun.

Canada was well represented at the conference, which attracted more than 300 delegates from 25 countries around the world. A full session was devoted to the ongoing environmental restoration efforts in the Sudbury area, and the Sudbury Soils Study in particular.

Speakers in our session included Glen Watson (Inco Ltd.), Marc Butler (Falconbridge Ltd.), Shawna Peddle (SARA Group) and myself. Laurentian University also sent two delegates: professors Graham Spiers, who chaired the session, and Peter Beckett, who presented a paper outlining the success of Sudbury's regreening efforts to date.



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Guest Column

The importance of sustainable development and ecological biodiversity were recurring themes throughout the five-day program. Although final results of the soils study will not be available until mid-2006, conference participants were impressed by the complex and comprehensive nature of the risk assessment process, as well as the commitment to community consultation.

"The story that unfolded that afternoon, by the team of experts from Ontario is definitely one that should be told again and again to a global audience," said Elizabeth Gardiner, vice-president of technical affairs for the Mining Association of Canada.

"The lessons learned from this groundbreaking initiative have enormous implications for the way mining companies deal with their communities of interest around the world, as they continually attempt to discover the true meaning of sustainability."

Regarded as a global leader in energy conservation and sustainable resources, Sweden is a beautiful country that is geographically similar to Northern Ontario. We were impressed with the Swedes' attention to waste management and public safety. Some members of our team drove from Stockholm to Skelleftea, and not one piece of garbage was seen on the roadsides.

Along the highways, a two-metre high fence was set back along the edge of the forests to prevent moose and deer from wandering into the road.

In some hotels, room keys were used to turn on lights to avoid unnecessary use (you have to take the key with you when leaving the room). And many toilets offered the option to half flush to conserve water.

Perhaps the most noticeable difference between Sweden and Canada is the lack of large vehicles. Gas-guzzling SUVs, pickup trucks and big luxury cars are virtually non-existent. At well over \$2 a litre for gasoline, there is strong incentive to drive fuel-efficient vehicles.

Attending this international conference proved to be a valuable experience, allowing the Sudbury team to share our lessons from Canada, and to gain more insight into the global relationship between mining and the environment.

The work being carried out as part of the Sudbury Area Risk Assessment keeps this city and our mining companies at the forefront of global initiatives in the field.

■ Christopher Wren is director of the Sudbury Area Risk Assessment (SARA) Group based in Guelph.