

8/28/2003

Gardens being studied for contamination

BY BILL BRADLEY

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A group of investigators are getting the dirt on Sudbury. And area gardeners are proving they are eager to have their gardens' soil and vegetables sampled for potential metal contamination.



Across the city more than 60 people have volunteered their gardens for an extensive scientific analysis by the Sudbury Soils Study. This project is looking at the risks to the local environment and human health from past mining practices such as heavy air pollution.

"We're doing a survey of gardens throughout Sudbury, taking soil samples from different depths and samples from leafy, fruiting and root vegetables such as lettuce, tomatoes and beets," said Chris Wren, director of the SARA Group.

Sudbury student Allison Merla, (right) now at Guelph University, and Melissa Jakola, a graduate of Laurentian, are working for the Sudbury Soil Study conducting the garden survey.

He is responsible for the whole multi-million dollar project including the garden survey.

"The whole process will take two hours," he said. "We take all the samples back with us."

Some preliminary preparation work is done in Sudbury and then the samples of soil and vegetables are sent to the University of Guelph for more preparation and analysis of toxic metal levels such as arsenic.

Gardeners will have to wait till next spring until they get any results.

"We want to put the information into a report," he said.

Besides gardeners, commercial berry farms and potato growers are involved in the project.

"All the data will be used in the ecological and human health risk assessment work we are doing," said Wren.

"We want to understand from the data in the report the exposure people have had to metals in their produce grown here. We will sample parts of those vegetables in a similar way that the people themselves harvest the mature produce," he said.

My garden is different from most other sites in that it has been gardened organically without chemical based pesticides or fertilizers for 21 years.

"It's excellent that it is an organic garden because we do not have anything which interferes with the interpretation of the metals result here. Knowing that no pesticides or anything else is involved makes our interpretation much easier," said Wren

The gardens being sampled are located throughout the area. "We do have a few gardens in the Long Lake area, some near Wahnapipei, also in the Valley and in Hanmer and as west as Whitefish," said Natalie Feisthauer, environmental toxicologist and leader of the garden survey.

For more information phone 673-6501.