

Safety activist protests role of Inco, Falco in soil study

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The \$5-million initiative to study human health and the environment from mining activities is being challenged by activists representing workers.

Homer Seguin, now a labour consultant, has 50 years experience in union occupational health and safety. In a letter he recently itemized the concerns over how decisions are made and how accessible data from the Sudbury Soil Study is to the public.

He sent the letter to Premier Ernie Eves and to leaders of opposition parties. He also made his case at the public advisory committee meeting earlier this week.

"Unions such as the Steelworkers and Local 598 need to be formally represented in this Sudbury Soil Study both on the decision making committee, the technical committee with voting rights, and the Public Advisory Committee," said Seguin.

Currently the technical committee is made up of representatives from Inco, Falconbridge, Ministry of Environment, Sudbury and District Health Unit, the City of Greater Sudbury, and Health Canada, First Nations Branch.

Union executives or concerned citizens from a union background are not represented, said Seguin.

"The persons most at risk are Inco and Falconbridge workers because for years we have used independent experts to verify the exposure these workers have had to toxic metals at work. When they go home they are exposed to further risks from contaminated soil, air and water," said Seguin.

"This letter is very significant because the presidents of Local 6500 and Local 598, representatives from Local 2020 Falconbridge and Local 2020 Inco and area reps from the Steelworkers signed the letter."

Seguin wants all technical committee meetings open to the public. He also wants Inco and Falconbridge represen-

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Checks and balances in place

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tatives removed from decision making on the technical committee because they are funding the study.

Seguin wants the Public Advisory committee be given the independent expert advice to assess the legitimacy of data collected.

MPP Shelley Martel said she sent the letter to the Minister of the Environment. "I said the make-up of the technical committee should be changed to avoid a potential conflict of interest by Inco and Falconbridge and challenged that the meetings are being held behind closed doors," said Martel Wednesday. "That would go a long way to comforting the community that everything is above board."

Her request was turned down.

Chris Wren of the SARA Group,

overseers of the soil study, said there are sufficient checks and balances to deflect this kind of criticism.

First all, final data and findings will be peer reviewed by international experts and by internal SARA Group experts. During the data collection and report writing stage two independent scientists, Stella Swanson and Ron Breecher are independently assessing the work.

Inco and Falconbridge have only one vote each on the technical committee and decisions are by consensus.

"There is no desire by us to control this study. Our families live here too," said Cory McPhee, manager of public affairs for Inco.

Science North biologist Franco Mariotti is the independent process observer hired to ensure a fair study process.