

Not looking for work: lawyer

Motivation of lawyer Eric Gillespie, who is representing Port Colborne residents against Inco Ltd., is questioned at Sudbury Soils Study meeting

By Carol Mulligan
THE SUDBURY STAR

The Toronto lawyer representing a number of Port Colborne residents in lawsuits against Inco Ltd. related to contaminated soils says he's trying not to get retained by anyone in Sudbury.

Eric Gillespie told the Sudbury Soils Study's public advisory committee Tuesday that he's had "hundreds of discussions" with people in the Sudbury area, but he's "declined the opportunity to represent them."

"We want to work with this committee instead," he said.

Gillespie's comments came after the only heated moment in the three-hour meeting, which dealt largely with procedural matters relating to the soils study process.

Members of the study's technical committee, the real decision-makers in the process, attended the meeting as did about 25 audience members.

After Gillespie delivered his 10-minute presentation, technical committee member Ido Vettoretti asked him, "Who's asking you to represent the people of Sudbury?"

Vettoretti also told Gillespie he was concerned with the "tone" of his presentation and said, "I believe we have the study in hand."

Vettoretti is a member of the technical committee from the Sudbury and District Health Unit, one of the study's six partners.

The other partners are Inco and Falconbridge Ltd., which are funding the three-year, \$5-million study, the Ministry of the Environment, the City of Greater Sudbury and Health Canada's First Nations and

NEXT MEETING

The public advisory committee will not meet again until January:

■ In the meantime, the Sudbury Soils Study will hold another open house Nov. 25 from 3-9 p.m. at the Inco Cavern at Science North.

■ For more information, 1-866-315-0228.

Inuit Health Branch.

The Ministry of the Environment asked Inco and Falconbridge to conduct the study after testing showed soils in Sudbury with elevated levels of nickel, copper, cobalt and arsenic, generally close to smelting sites in Coniston, Falconbridge and Copper Cliff.

Literally thousands of soil samples have been collected in an area about 200-by-200 km.

The Sudbury Soils Study has come under fire in the last six months from labour representatives upset because they have not been included on either the public advisory or technical committees for the study.

The main criticism has been — with Inco and Falconbridge footing the bill for the study and being partners in a study that may eventually order the mining giants to remove metals-contaminated soils — the study may be seen as biased.

Gillespie said there are "questions of science" that public advisory committee members may not be able to answer without scientific expertise to guide them.

The advisory committee's mandate is to inform the public about the work of the technical committee, which is done behind closed doors.

Its also functions as something of a watchdog, and that may be difficult to accomplish if PAC members don't understand the scientific information being presented to them by the technical committee, said Gillespie.

He has also been critical of the fact that Inco and the Ministry of

the Environment have employed one of the scientists contracted to review the technical committee's work, two members in the Sudbury Soils Study.

The technical committee has said it reviewed the qualifications of the scientist and is comfortable with the fact he is not in a conflict-of-interest position.

The issue of conflict of interest arose when John Fera, president of Local 6500 of the United Steelworkers of America, asked the PAC if there were any conflict-of-interest guidelines in place at technical committee meetings.

Fera said he believes he has a right to ask questions about the Sudbury Soils Study, based on the fact that he has worked for Inco for 33 years, his father for 37 years and his grandfather for more than 30 years.

Died of cancer

Both his father and grandfather died from cancer of the larynx, found in greater numbers in miners.

Public advisory committee chairman Ivan Fillion wasn't able to answer Fera's question, nor was Dick DeStefano, facilitator of the technical committee.

Longtime labour activist Homer Seguin also addressed the committee, urging the Sudbury Soils Study to consider the double whammy miners have suffered — both in the past and today.

Seguin urged the technical committee to review studies on the elevated risk of lung and nasal cancers, and laryngeal cancers among miners and even their family members who are subjected to carcinogens second-hand from clothing.

"This cries for attention," said Seguin.

Chris Wren is head of SARA, the consulting group evaluating sampling information and examining the risk of contaminants on human health and the environment.

Wren said SARA will consider miners as a subgroup in its study, the same way smokers will be considered.