

Soils study gets shot in arm

Would be 'virtually impossible' for any group to influence outcome, meeting told

By Carol Mulligan
THE SUDBURY STAR

At least six checks and balances are in place to make sure the Sudbury Soils Study is unbiased, says the head of the Sudbury Area Risk Assessment (SARA) Group.

"It's virtually impossible for one group to influence the outcome of the study," Chris Wren told about 75 people last night during a presentation on the Sudbury Soils Study in the Inco Cavern at Science North.

While the study process is so thorough as to be "a real pain" sometimes, the result



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Andrew Jackson, 14, and David Kerr look over a map depicting arsenic in Sudbury-area soils. Sudbury Soils Study held an open house Tuesday in the Inco Cavern at Science North.

will be a study "which is accountable and sound," Wren told the Sudbury Soils Study's second open house.

Wren was clearly reacting to public criticism about the fact Inco and Falconbridge

Ltd. are partners in the study to determine the level of toxic metals in Sudbury soils and their impact upon the people and environment of the area.

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Soils: validity questioned

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Critics have called the validity of the three-year, \$5-million study into question because it is being funded by the two mining giants. If the study determines Sudbury's soils are contaminated and must be remediated, the mining companies will pay the costs.

Some of the checks and balances in place to prevent any partner from unduly influencing the soils study are the independent process observer, the independent expert review panel, the public advisory committee and internal quality controls of the SARA Group, said Wren.

The goal of the study, he said, is to make Sudbury "a safer and better place to live ... if we can't achieve that, why do the study?"

More than 10,000 soil samples have been taken and are being analysed to determine whether the levels of "metals of concern" in soils pose a risk to human health or the environment. If the study shows they don't, there will be a "formidable amount of information" to back up that conclusion, said Wren.

If the study concludes they do pose a risk, SARA will outline what needs to be done to correct that, "and the companies (Inco and Falconbridge) are committed to doing that."

The Sudbury Soils Study was launched after the Ministry of the

Environment recommended it be conducted after its tests showed concentrations of metals exceeding the ministry's generic soil quality guidelines.

The first phase of the study was the collection and analysis of new soil samples in an area about 200-by-200 km, "roughly the size of Switzerland," said Wren.

The second phase is conducting the ecological and human health risk assessments. Results of the study and SARA's final recommendations are expected by early summer 2005.

Dr. Lesbia Smith, a member of the SARA group, said she is available to speak to people in Sudbury who may have concerns about if and how chemicals such as nickel, arsenic, copper, lead and selenium are affecting their health.

Sudburians are invited to contact Smith through the SARA group and speak to her confidentially about their concerns.

Smith also will speak to callers' family physicians if callers want them to do so. SARA is planning to distribute information packages to all physicians in the study area in the next month or so, said Smith, with practical information about the effects of particular metals on health and signs of metal contamination.

Smith can be contacted by phoning 1-866-315-0228.