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Contaminated soil from Toronto construction sites barred from Scugog

"This is a very large problem across the province," says township Mayor Tom Rowett.



ANDREW FRANCIS WALLACE / TORONTO STAR Order this photo

The possibility that fill from Toronto construction sites is contaminated is becoming a concern in rural areas where landowners have accepted it.

By: [David Rider](#) City Hall Bureau Chief, Published on Sun May 17 2015

Scugog Township is barring the door to 200 daily truckloads of soil — some of it from Toronto building sites — after tests found it was contaminated above provincial standards.

Scugog Mayor Tom Rowett says the problem at Greenbank airfield near Port Perry is the tip of a dirty iceberg, and that means the Ontario government and downtown developers should take more responsibility for “fill.”

“This is a very large problem across the province, and for each municipality to deal with it through their bylaws, and to pay for all this testing themselves, is inadequate,” Rowett said.

Trucks stopped rumbling into Greenbank Airways, a privately owned aerodrome on regional Highway 47 northwest of Port Perry, shortly after its agreement with the township allowing it to accept fill expired March 31.

Scugog hired lab Golder Associates to test the site. Soil samples from 12 of 16 boreholes [turned up contaminants](#), including [lead](#) and [benzene](#), at levels above regulatory standards for that site.

Debris in the tested fill included red brick and wood fragments, asphalt, plastic, rubber and glass.

The Star [revealed last fall](#) that Toronto’s construction boom is unearthing massive volumes of soil contaminated with dangerous heavy metals and petroleum, and Ontario does not track where it’s going.

Experts warned that, while some land owners get rich by accepting hundreds of truckloads of fill a day, insufficient oversight could put agricultural land and groundwater at risk.

The environment ministry launched a review of the need for a province-wide policy on soil and fill management. It says now that, after extensive consultations, the review will be finished “in the very near future.”

Scugog’s lawyers met in recent days with Doug LeBlanc, of D.L. Services Inc., which screens soil going to the site owned by Robert Munshaw of Ajax, and they are to meet again soon so LeBlanc can present a cleanup plan.

Talks about renewing the operating agreement will happen only after the soil is remediated. The owner would also have to agree to more controls and safeguards to keep out contaminated fill, Rowett said.

Ultimately, though, he said it’s unfair for the province to put the burden and costs of policing such sites on municipalities. GPS and other tools should be used to hold developers responsible for disposal of their fill, he added.

LeBlanc said in an interview that concerns over the contamination have been “blown out of proportion.”

He noted there is no indication the chemicals fouled groundwater or wells on adjacent properties. Most of the contaminants are components of asphalt, he said.

“If it’s so dangerous, what about in the city of Toronto — how many people are dying there from it?” LeBlanc said.

Still, LeBlanc conceded the contamination is above the Ministry of Environment's ["Table 2" regulations](#) for the Greenbelt property and said he will help the owner, who could not be reached for comment, clean it up as quickly as possible.

"We're going to abide by all the rules," LeBlanc said.

Carmela Marshall, of advocacy group [Lakeridge Citizens for Clean Water](#), called the contamination "significant and quite scary."

Her group wants more testing on the site and for any agreement allowing more fill shipments to be "comprehensive and conservative," with permit conditions and a compliance program whose costs are borne by the owner.

Kate Jordan, a spokeswoman for Ontario's environment ministry, said it's up to Scugog to decide on a new agreement, but the department remains available to offer advice on "next steps."

Last fall, Environment Minister Glen Murray told the Star that better controls are needed to deal with what he termed a "serious issue" that for him is at the "top of environmental and economic concerns" in Ontario.