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The Hamilton Spectator

Mississauga dumping tainted street-sweeping dirt on Hamilton and Cayuga: MOE

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STREET SWEEPER | The Hamilton Spectator file photo

The province says dozens of properties in and around Hamilton ended up as dumping grounds for dirty street-sweeping detritus offered as "fill" by the City of Mississauga.

The Ministry of the Environment is poised to order Mississauga to study — and in at least one case, clean up — 40 sites across southern Ontario.

That includes a Cayuga farm where tests of 1,000 tonnes of street-sweeping grit show arsenic and lead "at levels which could present an unacceptable risk to human health due to direct contact," says a ministry report.

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But Mississauga says the ministry has "mischaracterized" the material as waste and the city would consider appealing the order, if it is issued.

Provincial law allows cities to sweep collected road grit onto the shoulder, mix it with clean sand for winter use or even recycle it into construction materials. Otherwise, the material is "waste" that belongs in a landfill, said ministry spokesperson Donette Stoll.

Street-cleaning "can sweep up a lot more than dust," said Environment Hamilton's Lynda Lukasik, whose group tracks local road dust problems. Industrial-area dust can include chemicals from car exhaust, tire rubber, metal cuttings and carbon black.

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Mississauga stopped screening and giving out road grit in 2012 in response to ministry concerns. But city solicitor Mary Ellen Bench argued via email the practice is "not uncommon," pointing Thursday to the City of Brampton. That city's webpage stated as late as last November screened street-sweeping material "can be used as clean fill for city and private construction projects." That particular message was no longer visible on the webpage Thursday, however.

Bench said Mississauga started distributing screened street-sweeping material upon resident request in 2004 after its Britannia landfill closed.

In Hamilton, such material is landfilled. Stoll said the ministry is not aware of any other city "not following ministry protocol."

A draft director's order, now posted [online](#) for public comment, says the material was deposited over eight years on properties in Hamilton, Whitby, Guelph, Haldimand, Halton, Peel and Waterloo.

An accompanying provincial officer's report acknowledges Mississauga hired more than one consultant to study the issue and submitted its own chemical analyses of the piles of screened street-sweepings stored at a Mavis Road yard. But the report says the ministry is not satisfied with the findings.

The ministry is still contacting potentially affected landowners and won't identify specific sites for now, Stoll said, but added they include commercial, residential and farm properties. There are two "suspected sites" in Hamilton.

The Cayuga farm is identified as a particularly "sensitive" site and the proposed order would force Mississauga to remove hundreds of tonnes of dumped fill.

Haldimand's acting medical officer of health, Dr. Malcolm Lock, said he has met with MOE officials and learned there may be four sites in need of testing in the county.

Lock said he expects to conduct "combined inspections" with the MOE at each site, but has yet to receive a list of addresses. "We would be concerned about any potential health impacts to residents.

We'll want to know what kind of contaminants, if any, are in the material, and how close it is to homes, crops, wells or aquifers," he said.

"We obviously want to know more, but I'd say it's too soon right now to know if it's a situation to be really concerned about."

Hamilton public health officials are aware of the issue and will work with the MOE to talk to affected residents as property assessments occur, said spokesperson Aisling Higgins. So far, she said the MOE believes local sites identified for study present a "low risk of impact to health."

Councillors in rural Hamilton have become increasingly frustrated over time with uncontrolled dumping of construction fill.

Street-sweepings, however, "would be something new to worry about," said Flamborough Coun. Rob Pasuta, who has personally tracked suspicious fill dumping in his rural ward but hadn't heard about the proposed ministry order.

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