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## 50,000-plus trees at risk: Council calling for quicker action on Port Hope Area Initiative cleanup changes

Council to ask CNSC to prioritize decision; concerns include loss of trees, community disruption

By [Sarah Hyatt](#) Northumberland News

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Council wants the [Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission \(CNSC\)](#) to prioritize consideration of the [proposed changes to cleanup criteria](#) under the [Port Hope Area Initiative \(PHAI\)](#).

At its latest meeting, a unanimous council, at the committee level, supported pushing the request through to the CNSC. [Council's ask, via the mayor's office, is for the CNSC to prioritize the application and render a decision "expeditiously."](#)

The request would outline how consideration should include impacts surrounding the loss of tree canopy and the extended period of community disruption if the criteria isn't changed, among other concerns, including interim impacts while waiting on a CNSC hearing and decision.

"It is estimated that over 50,000 trees may be required to be removed to meet current criteria," Sue Bernardi, the municipal project staff team leader, recently told council. (Number of woodlots, trees on private properties and trees along road allowances potentially impacted.)

Just recently, at an [earlier committee-of-the-whole meeting](#), municipal staff led council through a deep dive into the status of the PHAI. This presentation touched on progress, work left to do, challenges, including those surrounding "chasing arsenic," in addition to proposed cleanup changes and related impacts should those changes happen or not. This led to concerns voiced by council and the public, though some area residents/homeowners have long expressed concerns.

In late 2020, [project leaders started the process to change cleanup criteria](#), and at this time, while explaining changes, told council and the community this may help address local concerns. Among those leaders were [Atomic Energy of Canada Limited \(AECL\)](#) and [Canadian Nuclear Laboratories \(CNL\)](#) officials.

AECL is the crown corporation responsible for the safe delivery of the PHAI and oversight of CNL, which is implementing the historic low-level radioactive waste cleanup. CNL's application to the CNSC was submitted in 2020; it proposes changes to criteria for arsenic and uranium.

In short, this would change the level of contamination allowed to be left in place and deemed "clean" after remediation.

Initially, CNL anticipated a CNSC hearing would happen in 2021, but no date has been set by the commission, said PHAI spokesperson Bill Daly, noting the current mandate can't change before this.

Currently, a hearing isn't anticipated before next year.

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["As part of this process, CNL completed extensive public engagement on the proposal to change the cleanup criteria"](#)

recommended levels will not pose any additional risk to the health of the community,” said Daly, adding work is continuing with all partners and regulators to gather more info to support CNL’s application.

When a hearing date is set, it will be made public, noted Daly.

According to advocates of the revised criteria, benefits include maintaining protection of human health and safety, but less environmental impacts, specifically regarding tree removal. Additional indicated benefits include a reduction in properties needing remediation (down from 1,200 to 800), reduced disruption to the public, with time spent at properties significantly reduced (potentially down to weeks versus several months or longer sometimes), and overall, reduced project costs and schedule.

As previously reported, through additional testing and data collection, Port Hope’s area of impact is larger than anticipated. The last firm dates – under current criteria – suggested the PHAI wouldn’t wrap until 2027-28.

The council vote will be at the next May meeting.

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