

Port Hope Area Initiative cleanup changes could address some residents' concerns: CNL

Community asked to share thoughts on proposed cleanup criteria changes

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A proposal is in the works to change the [Port Hope Area Initiative's](#) (PHAI) cleanup criteria.

And if it goes through, project leaders say this may help address some community concerns, including the length of time it takes to clean up properties, impacts to properties, as well as unintended environmental concerns which have been raised and realized as remediation work continues in recent years.

"We believe that a Port Hope (specific) solution is what needed," says Richard Sexton, president and CEO of [Atomic Energy of Canada Limited](#) (AECL). (AECL is the crown corporation responsible for the safe delivery of the PHAI and the oversight of [Canadian Nuclear Laboratories](#), which is implementing the federal environmental cleanup of low-level radioactive waste through its Historic Waste Program Management Office.)

WHAT ARE THE PROPOSED CHANGES?

CNL has applied to the [Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission](#) (CNSC) proposing changes to the cleanup criteria for arsenic and uranium. AECL has also "carefully reviewed the proposal and is supportive."

Simply put, this would change the level of contamination allowed to be left in place and deemed "clean" after remediation work. CNL and AECL say they've been in discussions with regulators, which have indicated the proposed changes are safe and protective of human health.

WILL THE PUBLIC GET A SAY?

There will be a "formal review process by the CNSC." As part of this and to gauge the community's thoughts, CNL plans to undertake a three-month public engagement process.

The next "critical step" is wider public engagement. This will happen before a decision.

Residents can visit www.phai.ca/en/home/cc-change.aspx for a list of ways to participate.

WHY NOW?

CNL says it's proposing these changes "having determined the criteria's conservative levels for arsenic and uranium are resulting in negative impacts to the community and natural environment."

Port Hope council also recently heard from Sexton and Scott Parnell, general manager of the Historic Waste Program Management Office, as the two detailed the proposal and plans to get residents' feedback.

"The real-life experience gained by completing a number of remediation activities in Port Hope has made it very apparent to CNL, AECL and many of the property owners that the application of the generic cleanup levels — as currently defined — are frankly impractical and likely will have a significant negative impact on both the natural and build characteristics of the town," said Sexton. "And as it stands today, the project has a very real potential of causing lasting, unintended negative consequences, without any real measurable or meaningful benefits to property owners or the municipality, in terms of reduced health risk, environmental impacts or final property status."

The scope of the cleanup is also "significantly larger" than first anticipated, with more info only obtained through testing and remediation work, it was explained.

Hundreds more properties were identified since the original vision and at times areas have doubled in size, said Parnell.

But it also residents' feedback driving change, says CNL.

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

CNL says the following concerns have been raised by residents and the community:

- Dissatisfaction with the length of time it takes to clean up residents' properties (and the current "all-or-nothing" approach)
- Owners want more input in decisions; and the ability to choose to leave waste behind to preserve certain features

- Unintended impacts of project on natural environment, including a “significant loss of trees” in the urban area, demolitions and negative impacts to natural character and heritage features.

Another common question has been why the need for such an intrusive, wide-scale cleanup, when the CNSC has indicated no adverse effects to health and the environment, said Parnell.

HOW LONG WOULD THIS TAKE?

A CNSC review hearing is expected in spring 2021; a decision might not happen until summer. (Acceptance by all legal parties needed.)

Major site work will continue during this time and CNL will be selective with its small-scale properties, avoiding those which might see less disruption during cleanup later, said Parnell.

Under current criteria, it’s anticipated the PHAI won’t be done until 2027-28. CNL has spent half its budget and may have to go back to the Canadian government for upwards of \$300 million, he said.

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