



## Coalition for a Better St. Catharines FAQs

Q: If there is a real problem with the GM Property threatening the environment and citizens why hasn't MECP taken action?

A: Under Ontario's Environmental Protection Act, MECP has the power to order actions to protect citizens if contaminants are entering a natural environment or threatening human life.

However MECP approach to issues with the former GM property has been confusing at best. First, an MECP spokesperson claimed that they had been regularly monitoring the site. However that turned out to be false. It was not until the Coalition brought the condition of the site to the attention of Council that MECP inspected the site and took water samples in February of 2020. And even concerning highly visible building debris piles and the fear that asbestos or other wind-borne contaminants could be blown into the adjoining neighbourhood, it was not until July of this year that MECP had an air quality monitoring plan in place.

MECP also informed us that they were not concerned unless it could be shown that contaminants were leaving the site. However their own testing and the ELM Memo have now shown that indeed contaminants are leaving the site.

Q: The site is a horrible eyesore in full view in the middle of the city, with unauthorized people on the site day and night. Why has the City tolerated this situation when its citizens are exposed to this unhealthy situation?

A: In 2018 demolition stopped and the site was abandoned, The owner erected temporary fencing along the property boundaries that was broken in many places and open in others allowing trespassers to easily enter the property over, under and through the fence and occupy demolished buildings,

The city has taken Bayshore to court for violations of fire code orders. The case drags on in the courts. A security patrol was hired by the city for 3 months but neighbours continued to observe trespassers on the site. The city asked Bayshore to repair the fence and plywood sheets were affixed to the chain link fence. Despite these actions, the unpainted plywood is now unsightly and weathering and multiple openings in the fence remain. The site with all its dangers is still frequently entered by trespassers and neighbourhood kids.

Q: Still, the City must have some power to force a clean up of the GM Property. Why hasn't this been done?

A: As we have said nothing was done from 2018 until the Coalition brought to Council a petition signed by over 2,200 citizens demanding a clean up. The city then allocated \$40,000 to hire Gowling, a Toronto-based law firm to advise them presumably on how they could take legal action to get the site cleaned up. Unfortunately citizens have been left in the dark by Council regarding their plan to secure the site and clean it up. The contract with Gowling and their recommendations to Council have been kept from the public citing Client-Solicitor privilege.

Q. Isn't the rule: polluters pay? How has General Motors Canada avoided taking responsibility for this mess?

A. Good question and one for the lawyers. GM occupied the site for almost a hundred years and the chemicals in the soil and asbestos in the buildings were the direct result of manufacturing activities on the site. So saying, it's not unusual to find contaminants such as PCBs and Asbestos in and under an industrial site like this. However the ultimate responsibility for removing the chemicals and compensation for their damage to the environment or human health is a question we cannot answer.

Q. We see by MECPs findings and the ELM report that contaminants are leaking into Twelve Mile Creek below the GM Property. Do these contaminants diluted by the Creek water pose any danger to the environment or human health?

A: The contaminants in question, metals and PCBs have been found to degrade aquatic habitat and are problematic for human health. Even at low levels a leak into 12MC of PCBs or metals are toxic and they can be accretive and mount up to a significant quantity. Remember that TMC flows downstream to the Henley Rowing course, the site of the Canada Games and World Rowing competitions and then empties into Lake Ontario. The environmental sensitivity of our Great Lakes is of great concern to Ontario, Canada and the U.S. We don't need to be leaking industrial contaminants into these important habitats and water sources for millions of people.

Q. Twelve Mile Creek is one recipient of contaminants. But the site is surrounded by residential neighbourhoods, day care centres and a public park. Are the residents of the neighbourhood at risk?

A" We think it is reasonable to expect that ground or surface water leakage of contaminants can occur at any point around the GM Property. This would mean that people in homes etc adjoining the site could be exposed to the same toxic PCBs and metals leaking off the site on the west side.

There's another source of great concern and that is the huge amount of asbestos used on the site. Asbestos was used in manufacturing brake linings in pipe and ceiling insulation and in dozens of other places in the plant. We cannot imagine that the debris piles and half demolished buildings would not contain asbestos fibres that can easily blow around and find their way into the neighbourhood. And it takes the inhalation of just a few asbestos fibres to cause serious health problems.

Q. Certainly asbestos is cause to worry. Why wouldn't the government have ordered the safe removal of the debris piles and the completion of demolition of the buildings?

A: It seems no one wants to take responsibility for ordering the removal of what would be considered an obvious threat to human health. MECP says that asbestos is the problem of the Minister of Labour (MOL). Why MOL and MECP would not at least determine the content of the debris piles is a mystery given the potential threat to human health.

As we have mentioned previously nothing had been done since demolition stopped in 2018 until the Coalition informed Council of citizens' concern. MECP has taken air samples this summer. They may or may not find problems but even so without knowing what is in the piles, the buildings and on the surface they will not have a complete picture of potential problems on the surface of the former GM Property..

Q: If this is a human health problem why hasn't Public Health stepped in?  
We did ask that question to Niagara's chief medical officer of health in January but did not receive a satisfactory answer. And in fairness with the pandemic they have had some serious issues to deal with at this time. However, we have, as part of this public outreach, sent them a letter requesting they investigate.

Q. What action do you expect as the result of this public outreach?

A: Given the history of this site and the lack of initiative at all levels of government, we are challenging government to step up and get the site cleaned up and keep any more contaminants from leaving the property. As well the Canadian Environmental Law Association has provided us with information on other legal avenues of recourse that we plan to pursue..

Q: The GM Property is up for sale. Wouldn't the best course of action be to wait until it is sold and let the new owner take responsibility for cleaning up the site?

A. Been there. Done that.