



September 15, 2020

Citizens Group Presents Case for Immediate Clean Up of Former GM Property

The Coalition for a Better St. Catharines, a local citizens' advocacy group, released new evidence today that challenges the Province and the City to take immediate action to clean up the half demolished former GM manufacturing site on Ontario Street.

“Recent testing by the Ministry of the Environment Conservation and Parks (MECP) and a report from environmental experts proves dangerous contaminants are leaving the site and entering Twelve Mile Creek.” says Coalition spokesperson Dennis Van Meer, “this is an obvious violation of Ontario’s Environmental Protection Act and it puts the environment and citizens at risk.”

The Coalition cites data released on July 16 quantifying results from surface water samples taken in February of 2020. This data shows metals, PCBs and other industrial chemicals are clearly leaving the site and entering Twelve Mile Creek where it flows past the former GM Property through the Henley rowing area and into Lake Ontario. Many of these industrial chemicals, toxic to aquatic habitat and human health, were found in quantities greatly exceeding the Province’s own water quality guidelines (PWQO).

For example, Cadmium, classified as carcinogenic by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, was found entering Twelve Mile Creek (TMC) below the former GM property at concentrations 409% over the PWQO guidelines.¹

In addition, a memo prepared for the Coalition by the environmental consulting firm ELM provides further evidence that contaminants are leaving the site. ELM consultants noted in several areas on the downslope from the GM Property to Twelve Mile Creek, drainage channels showing the presence of white particulate residues, sparse vegetation in the channel, and dead branches on woody stems near the channel. According to ELM:

These observations collectively suggest runoff to TMC contains contaminants that are likely entering TMC, with unknown consequences on wildlife and human health.

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2008004/article/10717/6500108-eng.htm#:~:text=Chronic%20exposure%20to%20cadmium%20may,mineral%20density%20loss%20and%20hypertension.&text=Acute%20and%20chronic%20inhalation%20of%20cadmium%20can%20cause%20potentially%20fatal%20pulmonary%20dysfunction.>

According to information provided to the Coalition by the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA):

The PQWOs were designed to protect aquatic life and recreational uses. According to MECP's own policy direction, meeting the PWQOs is the minimum requirement. The policy direction also provides that where water quality does not meet the PWQOs, the water shall not be degraded further and all practical measures shall be taken to upgrade the water quality to the Objectives.²

The Coalition also notes the presence of debris piles left on the site after demolition stopped and half demolished buildings including a large storage building with an open roof full to the ceiling with fibrous building debris. Given the widespread use of asbestos in manufacturing processes as well as in pipes and building construction, there is heightened cause to suspect that asbestos fibres will be found in these exposed piles.

There is also good reason to believe that contaminants may be leaking to the adjoining neighborhood. As ELM comments:

The above evidence of the presence of unknown contaminant(s) on the site suggests that some contaminants may also be migrating from the Site to adjacent residential areas via surface water, ground water, or wind-blown dust, as migration of contaminants does not occur only in one direction or by a single pathway.

Clearly the situation at the GM Property contravenes Ontario's Environmental Protection Act

14 (1) Subject to subsection (2) but despite any other provision of this Act or the regulations, a person shall not discharge a contaminant or cause or permit the discharge of a contaminant into the natural environment, if the discharge causes or is likely to cause an adverse effect. ³

Given the nature and quantities of toxins leaving the site, the GM Property represents a contaminated "brownfield" property that, in its current condition, is a threat to the environment and human health. Despite pleas from residents, the City of St. Catharines has not taken any action to clean up the site or disclosed publicly a plan to do so. More delays in cleaning up the site cannot be tolerated. For that reason, the Coalition calls on the Province and the City to immediately:

- Close the land and secure the facility, to prevent public access to possible health and safety hazards;
- Demolish the buildings and remove all debris in an appropriate manner;

² Letter to the Coalition from the Canadian Environmental Law Association, September 3, 2020

³ <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90e19#BK16>

- Remove water-impermeable cover such as concrete and asphalt to control drainage;
- Drain existing ponds, whether natural or man-made'
- And as the soil under the concrete/asphalt is exposed and considered a contaminated "brownfield", the land and drainage must be secured against further migration of soil and dust via air and water.

The threat to the natural environment is obvious and proven. The threat to human health is implicit and inarguable. Faced with these threats and absent of any progress toward a cleanup, the Coalition is compelled to take action on behalf of the community, including but not limited to: .

- Requesting an investigation under the Environmental Bill of Rights
- Contacting Ontario's Pollution Hotline to request further remedial action and site monitoring
- Requesting that local provincial and federal representatives take up the matter
- Actively exploring the option of undertaking a private prosecution

For more information or to request an interview:

Dennis Van Meer (905) 359-9233 dlvanmeer@icloud.com

Barbara Scollick (905) 397-6897 scollick@gmail.com

Attachments:

- Pinchin Environmental: Soil Exceedances July, 2014
- MECP letter results from testing February, 2020
- Response to MECP by the Coalition for a Better St. Catharines
- Memo from ELM environmental consultants
- Recent photographs
- Frequently asked questions