

November 12, 2020

From: Members of
Unifor Local 199 Retired Workers Chapter

To: Hon. Walter Sendzik
Mayor of St. Catharines
St. Catharines City Council.

Mayor Sendzik and Council,

Our Chapter represents many of the retired workers who were employed at the General Motors Components plant on Ontario Street. This plant was sold by GM in 2014 to Bayshore Groups. Since Bayshore abandoned demolition in 2018, the site is now an eyesore and unsafe consisting of damaged, half-demolished buildings, piles of building debris and many open waste-oil ponds.

We are writing to you to call for the City to protect its citizens by immediately taking steps to secure this site, remove all materials from the surface including the half-demolished and unsafe buildings and ensure no contaminants are leaking off the site into Twelve Mile Creek or adjoining neighbourhoods.

We are familiar with the manufacturing processes conducted on the site and the amount of toxic chemicals and metals used in manufacturing and disposed of on the site. We know that exposure to these materials such as PCBs, PAHs, TCE and metals pose a human and environmental health hazard. The Pinchin environmental assessment confirmed that these toxins are still under the surface throughout the site at unacceptable levels.

For over forty years, asbestos was used in the assembly of brake linings, in equipment, and in building materials. Asbestos is highly toxic and carcinogenic even in very small quantities. Exposure to asbestos on the site was responsible for the tragic deaths of too many of our fellow workers and will likely lead to more deaths due to its latent toxicity.

Despite some efforts to remove asbestos, we have no doubt it is still present in the pipe insulation and ceiling tiles of the buildings that remain standing. Traces will also likely be found in the debris piles. And due to the amount of asbestos present during forty years of brake lining assembly, it is highly likely that asbestos is still in the soil throughout the site and could be carried off the site by surface or ground water.

The current condition of the former GM site is a potentially dangerous situation that needs to be remedied immediately. Until the site is thoroughly tested no one can say with any certainty that citizens in adjoining neighbourhoods would not be exposed to asbestos poisoning.

The fact that this situation exists today gives us little confidence in government regulatory agencies such as MOLTC and MOECP. We urge the Mayor and Council to seek independent advice and expertise. To assure us and the community that there is no threat from contaminants leaving the site, testing must be done of materials on the site, surface water, ground water and soil especially at the perimeter of the site.

Our history and familiarity with the dynamics of the former Components plant gives us alarm given its current state of disrepair. Unless the City has evidence to refute our conclusion with certainty, it must act at once to protect citizens.

Sincerely,

Bruce Allan
Retired GM Workers
Unifor Local 199

John Pula
Former Unifor Health and Safety Officer at the GM site