

Auditor general worried by contaminated sites

Department says people not at risk

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Nova Scotia's auditor general doesn't think enough is being done to prevent environmental and health risks from contaminated sites across the province.

"There are sites around the province in which there may be risk — environmental and health risks," Jacques Lapointe said Wednesday.

In a report to the House of Assembly, Lapointe said the Environment Department needs to improve monitoring of contaminated sites.

Lapointe said he's not an expert on pollution, but he based his long list of concerns on what environmental officials told him.

"And they have identified some in which they have stated there is unacceptable risk, and those sites are still there and nothing is being done about them," he said.

The auditor general didn't give any specific examples. But Lapointe said that inspectors need more training, the various sites need to be given priority for quicker clean up, and there should be an improved tracking system.

As of the end of March, the province was monitoring almost 40 contaminated sites ranging from abandoned gas stations and furnace oil spills on residential properties to industrial run-off in places such as Boat Harbour in Pictou County.

Environment Minister Sterling Belliveau said some of the auditor general's suggestions are helpful, and some are already being worked on.

But, he said he doesn't believe there are any situations where the health of Nova Scotians is being put at risk.

"I just want to point out that we respond to all complaints, and we do inspections and we determine the risk. So, there's work that's being done," Belliveau said. "This is a complex issue and there's a lot of these that we've inherited over decades."

Tamara Lorincz, executive director of the Nova Scotia Environmental Network, said there are large projects that need to be addressed — including Boat Harbour, which has contaminated run-off from a nearby pulp and paper mill.

"The people there in the community are desperate for a cleanup and there is no way the government of Nova Scotia has the funds on its own to help with that cleanup. They are going to need the federal government to step in," she said.

Belliveau agreed the cost of cleanups is a factor.

"There is going to be a lot of money involved, and we're a government that wants to live within our means," he said.

But Belliveau hopes the public will suggest some affordable solutions during a round of consultations on contaminated sites which continues until the middle of July.

Read more: <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/nova-scotia/story/2010/06/02/ns-auditor-general-contamination.html#ixzz0pkmKFKjO>

Read: Auditor General's June 2010 Report: <http://www.oag-ns.ca/June2010/full%20report.pdf>