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Standard Processes and New Technology Manage Environmental Risks on Highway 19A Project

The current upgrade project taking place along Highway 19A between Hilchey and Rockland roads requires strict environmental monitoring to ensure protection of the Simms Creek and marine environment.

“The Highway 19A Upgrade project is occurring along one of the most scenic roadways on Vancouver Island. Because of its location next to the ocean and close to Simms Creek, we’ve put in place specific environmental precautions,” explains the City’s general manager of operations, Ron Neufeld.

The construction contractor, local firm Upland Excavating, follows a range of environmental regulations and provides a weekly compliance report prepared by the project’s environmental compliance officer.

“The main elements of environmental risk prevention for the project involve controlling offsite release of sediment during construction, and working to prevent spills,” explains Rupert Wong, environmental compliance officer for this phase of the project. *“There are definitely concerns working so close to the water. For example, this time of year you have herring spawning close to the beaches so it’s important to control all sediment.”*

The highway improvements involve digging a series of deep trenches for the water and sewer lines. In some areas, these can run to five metres deep in close proximity to the ocean, which can result in significant groundwater flowing into the trenches.

A range of actions and technologies are being used to control water, sediment and potential spill risks. Techniques range from standard due diligence for projects near the foreshore to innovative technologies that offer new methods for dealing with environmental risks:

- Rather than stockpile the excavated materials (gravel, rock, dirt, etc.) on site, they are being hauled off-site to reduce point sources.
- All pavement and asphalt that is being stripped from the roadway and the seawalk is being crushed and recycled as reconditioned asphalt or paving material for future use.
- Spill kits adequate for the heavy equipment used on site are present at the work site. The site also has a containment plan and a contingency plan should any spills occur.
- An innovative tool being used involves removing and filtering groundwater that accumulates in each of the trenches. Trenches are dewatered using pumps run by a separate power source. This water is discharged into a large metal filtration box that holds about 18 cubic metres of clean drain rock. Sediment-laden trench water is pumped in and the sediment is filtered as the water works its way through the gravel. This box, developed and built by Upland Excavating for previous foreshore projects, releases the treated water onto the grass for infiltration and safe runoff onto the foreshore.
- To isolate the construction site from adjacent sensitive habitat, sandbag and filter-cloth berms have been set up along the one-kilometre length of the project, on both the foreshore side of the road and where Simms Creek parallels the road. These berms were established prior to construction and are designed to intercept any surface runoff and accidental spills.

- Stripping asphalt from the roadway and seawalk will temporarily expose an estimated 1.1 ha of soil. The berms are expected to prevent offsite release of sediment in the event of heavy rain. Gravel check dams have also been installed along vegetated roadside swales as an extra measure of precaution.
- The City has storm water catch basins along the route, which have all been fitted and protected with sediment traps that act as a filter. The catch basins are routinely inspected after rainstorms to make sure they are working properly. Extra catch basin sediment traps are kept on site so they can be changed when necessary.

The Highway 19A Upgrade project starts at Hilchey Road and continues north for just under one kilometre. Work includes the replacement of sewer, water, storm drain, and conversion of all overhead utilities (hydro, telephone and cable) to underground. The project will add curbs, sidewalks, landscaping and street lighting, to a similar standard as constructed through Willow Point, to the south. It will improve vehicle, transit, cycling and pedestrian routes as well as the reconstruction of a major sewage pumping station. The upgrade project is part of the waterfront vision established by the community to encourage medium-high density residential in-fill along this corridor.

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