

E-mail to the Premier

From: Nick Doe [<mailto:nickdoe@island.net>]
Sent: Thursday, January 28, 2010 2:23 PM
To: OfficeofthePremier, Office PREM:EX

Subject: The use of Texada aggregate on Gabriola Island by EMCON services Ltd.

Dear sir

I am writing on a topic that the Ministry of Transportation and successive Ministers (Kevin Falcon and Shirley Bond) have been dealing with for two years -- they have a fat file on the matter. The matter is unresolved and we are not making any progress, so as a last resort I am appealing to you for help.

I will try to be as brief as I can.

On Gabriola Island we have many unpaved roads and these are currently serviced by EMCON Services Ltd. For more than two years now, EMCON have been using an aggregate from Texada Island for road maintenance. The use of this material has engendered many complaints by Islanders, the basic problem being that the material contains too much clay and too much carbonate.

The clay-carbonate mixture sticks to surfaces and cannot be washed off with a hose; it seals in salt and promotes corrosion of vehicles; the clay gets into braking systems; there are reports of dogs paws becoming very sore possibly as a result of sealing in bacteria; the clay-carbonate mixture, when it sets, hinders good drainage, which results in the development of numerous potholes --- and so on. In short, it leaves our roads in a horrible mess.

We are quite used to unpaved roads on Gabriola and we are not seeking any improvement in their condition beyond what it was before EMCON took responsibility for them.

In the course of our dealing with this, we have conducted several scientific studies of the problem and assured ourselves that there are sound technical reasons for why the material is so unsatisfactory. These results have been shared with Ministry staff.

In spite of this, EMCOM continues to use the material. The essential problem here is that the material from Texada actually meets Ministry specifications and hence, though I am not privy to the details, I imagine EMCON's position is that they therefore have every right to use it.

The source of the dispute over the use of this particular Texada aggregate are as follows:

1. A clay carbonate mixture is geologically unusually and the relevant MOT specifications have nothing to say about its use -- the problem likely has never been encountered before. Texada Island has a fascinating but complex geology because it is the meeting point of Vancouver Island and the BC mainland.

2. EMCON has used the material on other island than Gabriola with good results. The problem here is that not all aggregate from Texada is the

same. I personally have experience of three sets of samples of what EMCON and the Ministry consider to be what is being used on Gabriola. All three sets were different.

One set was taken from the road on Gabriola by myself and tested in several different ways; another set was tested by MOT gravel experts and obtained from EMCON; and a third set was taken again by myself from Denman Island.

The set examined by the Ministry was measured against Ministry specifications and taken, when examined this way, as being satisfactory. It nevertheless contained large quantities of carbonate. These tests were later repeated by a consultant, Golder Associates, with essentially the same results except that they did not examine the geochemistry of the sample because MOT staff did not ask them to.

The roads on Denman are in excellent shape in my opinion and the tests I made of the material used there clearly indicated why. Their Texada aggregate contains no carbonate. In spite of this, and in spite of technical presentations of these facts to MOT staff, the Ministry and EMCON continue to offer the satisfactory state of the roads on other Gulf Islands as evidence that their use of the aggregate that they are using on Gabriola is justified.

To put this bluntly sir, my speculation is that in the past, problems of this nature would have been addressed internally within your Ministry by your own expert staff, but the new arrangements with contractors potentially hamper and complicate such communication because of contractual (legal) and financial considerations. I respectfully put to you that dealing with these problems to the satisfaction of Gabriolans would do much to improve not only their lives, but the lives of your staff who are at the "sharp-end" of the complaints, and do much to earn some respect of involved citizens for your government's policies with regard to road maintenance.

Sincerely
Nick Doe P. Eng.
1787 El Verano Drive
Gabriola, BC
Canada V0R 1X6
Phone: 250-247-7858
FAX: 250-247-7859
E-mail: nickdoe@island.net
web: www.nickdoe.ca

Reply from the Premier on Feb.1, 2010.

Thank you for your email regarding the use of Texada aggregate on the roads of Gabriola Island. I appreciate that you have written.

I understand that staff from the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure are working with you on an ongoing basis and that the ministry is also in the process of responding in writing to an earlier correspondence from you. I have shared your email to me with the Honourable Shirley Bond with a request that she ensure these comments are also considered in the ministry's response on my behalf.

Again, thank you for taking the time to raise your concerns with my office.
