

Dear editor

A recent newspaper report of the May 26th meeting between Gabriolans, MOT, and Emcon on the road goop problem has me saying that it was difficult to understand how so much clay could be in the road goop (Texada gravel) if it were being taken directly from a quarry wall. For the record, I said no such thing.

On the contrary, I explained at the meeting how it was geologically quite possible for a layer of bentonite (volcanic ash) to occur in a bed of limestone. What I said was that it was difficult to understand how the goop could have been taken directly from a quarry wall given that the main component is not calcite but carbonate-coated granodiorite chips. The carbonate coating is a mix of calcium and magnesium carbonates, and magnesium is bad news because its chloride is so corrosive. Mixes of calcium and magnesium carbonates are rare in nature, raising suspicions that the goop is the result of some unspecified mining activity and is not a "natural" product. It certainly is not limestone, which everyone, including myself, MOT, and Emcon, thought it was.

The significance of this is that on a short visit to Denman Island this week, which is where Emcon claim the road goop has been used with success, and this certainly appears to be so, I discovered that the material used there is not limestone either and in fact contains hardly any carbonate at all. Although there was clay in their mix, it contains more silt and fine sand than does the goop on Gabriola and is thus more permeable. The combination of less clay and no carbonate means their material would not form hydraulic cement as it does on Gabriola. My provisional conclusion pending the results of further lab. testing is that the differences between the islands is not inadequate drainage as suggested by Emcon (the roads on Denman have no high crowns), but a significant difference in the mineralogy and chemistry of the materials being used in the two locations. This reinforces my suspicion that the improvements being proposed by MOT and Emcom will not be nearly as effective as they imagine and they really should get someone who understands all aspects of the problem to work on this.

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