



Canadian Council of Independent Laboratories

For Immediate Release

CCIL Supports Recommendations of Auditor-General, Applauds MTO's Commitment to Addressing Oversight

TORONTO (December 8, 2016) – The Canadian Council of Independent Laboratories (CCIL) supports the recommendations of the Auditor-General of Ontario regarding the Ministry of Transportation, specifically those aimed at restoring and strengthening independent oversight of highway construction projects.

The Auditor-General's annual report, released last week, found that new and rehabilitated roads throughout the province are requiring repairs far sooner than expected, and that these premature failures are costing taxpayers millions of dollars in additional expenditures. It linked these problems directly to the lack of a rigorous and independent quality assurance process, noting that contractors are "essentially monitoring themselves with respect to engineering and material quality."

The report said MTO's increasing use of performance-based contracts has been a significant factor in this erosion of government oversight. Since these procurement arrangements (first introduced in 2010) require contractors to warrant that their work will meet specifications over defined periods of time, it was felt that independent testing and inspections were largely unnecessary.

As a result, contractors have been allowed to hire their own Quality Verification Engineers (QVEs) to certify that key construction activities are performed to appropriate standards, and to collect and submit their own asphalt samples for quality testing.

CCIL has been warning the province for years that this situation created huge potential for shortcuts to be taken and for abuses to occur. The Office of the Auditor-General has now confirmed there have been cases where contractor-hired QVEs have provided erroneous or misleading conformance reports to the Ministry, and a few contractors have failed to properly test materials and/or tampered with samples.

"We support the Auditor-General's recommendations that MTO put in place the controls and processes that will restore independent oversight," said Derwyn Reuber, Executive Director of CCIL. "This is critically important to assuring the public that their roads and bridges are safe and that their tax dollars are being spent wisely, especially now with the province planning to invest \$18 billion on highway expansion and rehabilitation over the next 10 years."

Reuber also applauded MTO's response to the report. The Ministry said it will be developing an Action Plan that addresses the Auditor General's observations and recommendations, and it will assume oversight of test samples starting next year.

"We've been urging the province to take a hard look at these issues, and we're pleased that MTO is now moving forward," Reuber commented. "We're ready to work with Ministry officials in any way we can to help ensure that standards are being met and taxpayers are getting the best value for their money."

CCIL has recommended that the provincial government:

- return to its former practice of requiring all public infrastructure projects – including highway construction – to be subject to independent testing and inspection;
- contract for these services directly, with reports being sent directly to government; and
- undertake a review of all the projects that have been exempted from independent testing in the past in order to identify those that might require special monitoring or testing to determine risk.

In addition, CCIL supports restoring full funding to MTO's Materials Engineering and Research Office (MERO) so that it can resume its important role of researching new construction technologies and highway materials.

CCIL represents the independent, private-sector laboratories in Canada. Because CCIL members are independent, they have no vested interest in the outcome of their testing. They are able to conduct investigations and render reports objectively and without bias.

Members operate more than 330 independent laboratory facilities across the country. CCIL member services are vitally important in helping to protect the public from structural failures, defective materials, dangerous and unsafe construction methods, and many other threats.

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