

Railroad tie grinding near Fraser River called ‘deplorable’

[Matthew Hoekstra - Richmond Review](#) Dec 3, 2014 at 4:00 PM

An East Richmond property where old rail ties are being ground up for other uses has drawn the ire of city hall.

“It’s a real affront to Richmond that this should be occurring within our city boundaries, and yet it’s on land that, because it’s a federal entity, we can’t necessarily govern,” said Coun. Linda Barnes.

Barnes, who didn’t seek re-election Nov. 15, raised the issue last Monday during her final council meeting as an elected official. Council referred the matter to staff, charging them to investigate the “disposition of creosote covered rail ties in Richmond.”

According to Bruce Richardson, a commercial real estate agent with CBRE Ltd., Canadian National Railway is bringing old rail ties to a yard at the north end of No. 5 Road, near the Bath Slough and Fraser River. He told *The Richmond Review* that when it rains there’s no place for the creosote—a chemical product used to preserve rail ties—to go other than into storm sewers.

Barnes called the situation “deplorable.”

“My point in bringing it forward and bringing it forward in this way is to basically embarrass CN and to bring it to the public attention,” she said.

The railway, however, says it’s “appropriately recycling” the railroad ties on the industrial property.

“All work and materials are contained within CN property, and the Ministry of Environment has been notified of the work being done on site,” said spokesperson Emily Hamer in an e-mail. “The work consists of grinding railway ties into material that will be used by another in their manufacturing process.”

Railway ties comprise the largest volume of creosote waste products in Canada. There are mixed opinions on the health and environmental impacts of substance, which is derived from coal tar.

According to an Environment Canada, health effects can depend on exposure. Short-term contact with eyes and skin could lead to redness and irritation. Repeated exposure, however, could cause cancer.

But an industry group says creosote-treated wood products have no demonstrable risk of causing chronic health problems or damage to the environment when used properly.

“The weight of evidence suggests that creosote does not pose significant cancer or other health risk to workers aside from skin conditions likely associated with chronic irritation and phototoxicity,” according to the [Creosote Council website](#).