SPOTLIGHT ON QPCO
A DISCUSSION WITH GRANT WALSOM AND FREESIA WAXMAN OF THE QUALIFIED PERSONS COMMUNITY OF ONTARIO

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In Ontario's environmental consulting landscape, the role of Qualified Persons (QPs) is critical, yet until recently, these professionals lacked a dedicated space to collaborate, share knowledge, and advocate for their community. Enter the Qualified Persons Community of Ontario (QPCO), an organization designed to bring QPs together and support them in navigating complex regulations, emerging contaminants, and industry challenges. In this interview, we sat down with Grant Walsom, Partner and Principal Engineer at Trace Associates and co-founder of QPCO, and Freesia Waxman, Associate, Environmental Engineering Services at Grounded Engineering and Vice Chair of QPCO, to explore the organization's origins, initiatives, and vision for the future.

Introduction & Personal Journeys

Grant Walsom began his career in environmental consulting after graduating from the University of Waterloo, benefiting from mentorship opportunities that shaped his path early on.

"One of the things I like about consulting is every day is different." – Grant

His engagement with industry associations like ONEIA and the Canadian Brownfield Network helped him expand his professional horizons and ultimately led to the creation of QPCO.

Freesia Waxman initially aspired to be a biochemical engineer but pivoted to environmental engineering after her first-year chemistry experience.

Her involvement in QPCO has provided her with community,

mentorship, and opportunities to contribute to the field beyond her day-to-day work.

"Environmental engineering...there's always contaminated sites. Those aren't going anywhere in my lifetime." – Freesia

Understanding QPCO

QPCO was formed to give Ontario's QPs a unified voice.

"With engineers and geoscientists both having their own regulatory bodies, we needed a third party to moderate that...bringing the QPs into what we're calling the community." – Grant

Supported by ONEIA and the Ministry of Environment, the community began in July 2021 and has since grown rapidly, now counting over 180 members.

Freesia joined QPCO early on and quickly became involved as the communications lead, later stepping into her role as Vice Chair.

"I didn't know how I could turn down the chance to be part of something so amazing and to be at the forefront of stuff." – Freesia

Current Work & Challenges

QPCO remains deeply engaged in initiatives addressing complex environmental issues. One current focus is a bedrock technical working group tackling challenges related to moving bedrock under Ontario's excess soil regulations.

"It's a passion project...with representatives from geotechnical engineering, environmental consultants, labs, and even the ministry actively involved." – Freesia

The organization is also developing training modules to improve conceptual site models for Records of Site Condition submissions, ensuring QPs deliver consistent, high-quality work.

"The ministry is helping us ensure the content is good and meets all their expectations." – Grant

Regulatory issues, particularly around excess soil, remain hot topics.

"It's multifaceted...there's a lot of growing pains in that area." – Freesia

QPCO has already seen tangible successes, including winning the 2024 Brownie Award for legislative and program initiatives, and hosting its sold-out first annual workshop, which brought together hundreds of QPs to share knowledge and network.

Building a Professional Community

QPCO's strength lies in its community.

"A big family...everyone's got a role to play, everyone's valued for who they are, what they bring, their experience, and their interests." – Grant

Peer support and mentorship are central, helping members navigate complex projects and retain institutional knowledge as seasoned professionals retire.

"Some of our best conversations with the membership have been people just saying, 'Oh man, I have a cobalt exceedance...has anyone else seen that?' And then the discussion just runs away." – Freesia

Webinars, committees, and regular outreach keep members engaged and ensure the community evolves alongside emerging industry challenges.

Looking Ahead

QPCO has ambitious plans for the coming year, including workshops, webinars, and participation in conferences such as RemTech East. Training modules for conceptual site models are set for rollout in November, further supporting professional development.

In the next five years, Freesia hopes to see "the majority of QPs in Ontario...active QPCO members, with no hesitation to call one another for project-specific questions," while Grant envisions QPCO becoming widely recognized for professionalism, ethics, and expertise across Canada.

Final Reflections

For aspiring QPs, the advice is clear: get involved, ask questions, and build your network.

"Surround yourself with the best people that you can." – Freesia

"The power of your network is amazing...without that network, QPCO would never have gotten off the mat." – Grant

Both guests underscored that QPCO is powered by volunteers, driven by collaboration, and committed to providing a low-cost, high-value platform for Ontario's QPs

"It's not by ourselves; it's collectively...with the group and amazing support." – Grant

For more information:

Visit **QPCO** to learn about the community and explore their directory.

And for insights on environmental risk and property due diligence, visit ERIS' **InfoHUB**.





Freesia Waxman, M.A.Sc., P.Eng., QPESA, QP, Associate, Environmental Engineering Services, Grounded Engineering

Freesia *is an environmental engineer with 14 years of experience in project management, technical review, and consulting. She specializes in Excess Soil management, site assessments, remediation, and compliance. A licensed Professional Engineer and Qualified Person (QPESA), she holds Civil Engineering degrees from McMaster University and is recognized for expertise in Ontario's O.Reg. 406/19.*



Grant Walsom, B.A.Sc., P.Eng., QP, Partner/Principal Engineer, Trace Associates Inc.

Grant *is a Professional Consulting Engineer with extensive experience in environmental services, specializing in remediation, brownfields, compliance, and waste management. Skilled in business development with a Business Administration diploma from Wilfrid Laurier University, he has served on boards for ONEIA and CBN and founded the Qualified Persons Community of Ontario (QPCO).*

Moderated by:



Brayden Ford, Vice President, Sales, Canada, ERIS

Brayden*'s inspired journey with ERIS began in 2012. Since then, he's succeeded in a variety of sales roles in both Canada and the United States. His diverse skill set has helped the company foster and grow the business across North America. In his current role, Brayden is responsible for leading the Canadian sales team, managing existing clients and developing new business.*

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