

Investor's Circle Update

Dedicated Decade: An Update on the Brake Pad Partnership

From the Bay to the boardroom, the lab to the Legislature, Sustainable Conservation's Brake Pad Partnership has come a long way since its inception over a decade ago. For years, the Partnership – an uncommon alliance of brake manufacturers, stormwater agencies and environmental groups – has worked tirelessly to identify and address the environmental consequences of copper from automobile brake pads. Beyond its specific project scope, the Partnership is a remarkable example of where Sustainable Conservation has been and where we're going.

COPPER 101

Each time drivers step on their brakes, small amounts of debris are released onto streets, into the air and, eventually, into waterways. No big deal, right? Wrong. California drivers hit their brakes hundreds of millions of times a day – which adds up to a substantial quantity of debris, much of which contains copper. Copper that ends up in streams, rivers and coastal waters is toxic to phytoplankton and disrupts the aquatic food chain. Elevated copper levels are also one of the factors contributing to the decline of salmon populations. What's worse, once copper has



Copper from automobile brake pads is contributing to the decline of endangered fish such as coho and steelhead by interfering with their ability to identify predators and locate spawning grounds.

been deposited into water, it is extremely difficult – and extremely expensive – to get it out.

High levels of copper are found in urban watersheds across California. Through maximum allowable limits for copper pollution mandated by the State Water Resources Control Board, municipalities within these watersheds are now responsible for taking onerous and costly clean-up measures – and they have to demonstrate significant progress

toward compliance by 2018.

Could brake pads be the culprit? Moreover, could they provide the key to an economically viable solution to the problem? Sustainable Conservation set out to investigate.

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Instead of polarizing environmental and industry interests by heading straight to the courtroom, we convinced the various stakeholders to try a

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“By banning the use of copper in vehicle brake pads, California has the opportunity to again lead the nation in protecting our environment.”

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different approach: collaboration. In 1996, Sustainable Conservation convened the Partnership to understand the impact of copper from brake pads on water quality. When joining the Partnership, industry representatives agreed that if science showed copper in brake pads was indeed a significant contributor to water quality degradation, they would voluntarily reduce copper in brake pad formulations.

PIVOTAL OUTCOMES

Over the years that followed, the Partnership conducted rigorous scientific studies to determine the role brake pads play in elevated copper levels within San Francisco Bay Area watersheds. The results of these studies indicate that copper from brake pads accounts for the majority of the human-generated copper in highly urbanized watersheds. With this news, the industry was ready to honor its commitment AND raise the stakes on behalf of the Golden State's environmental and economic health.

NEW DIRECTIONS

By recommending the introduction of state legislation to limit the amount of copper in brake pads, the industry helped steer the Partnership – and Sustainable Conservation – into the policy realm. This initially surprising recommendation ultimately makes great sense: legislation would address environmental and economic concerns by maximizing positive

impact on water quality and guaranteeing a level playing field for all brake pad manufacturers. Dynamic solutions are the name of the game at Sustainable Conservation, and the Partnership's willingness to adapt its strategy accordingly speaks to the importance of persistence and flexibility in effecting powerful environmental change.

In early 2009, Sustainable Conservation introduced Senate Bill (SB) 346, authored by Senator Christine Kehoe (D-San Diego), to reduce and eventually remove copper from brake pads sold in California, thereby addressing a serious threat to aquatic health and allowing local governments to meet their obligations under the Clean Water Act. The bill also requires that new brake pads meet all applicable safety and performance standards, and includes provisions to ensure that copper will not be replaced by materials containing other harmful substances.

VICTORY, REGROUPING

SB 346 passed out of the California State Senate on June 3 – a very exciting day! To bolster our chances at success in the State Assembly, the Partnership

decided to make SB 346 a two-year bill. For now, the bill is being held in the Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials, with the goal of taking it up again in the 2010 legislative session. This additional time will allow the Partnership to further clarify and strengthen the bill, and conduct outreach with and allay concerns for those individuals and organizations currently opposed to the bill (including the car companies). The coming months will also provide an opportunity to formalize implementation and enforcement specifics for the copper reduction program.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Building on a decade of sound science and balanced problem-solving, the Partnership has made extraordinary progress on behalf of California's water quality in 2009. By raising consciousness about the power of our cooperative approach, Sustainable Conservation has already set a positive precedent in the Legislature. In 2010, we hope California will take the next big step by approving and signing SB 346 – a truly collaborative solution to a serious environmental problem. ■

To learn more, visit www.suscon.org/bpp.

After passing out of the California State Senate, SB 346, which aims to effectively eliminate all copper in brake pads sold in California, will go before the State Assembly in 2010.

