

THE GREAT LAKES BINATIONAL TOXICS STRATEGY

The Facts about Coal Tar Sealants (CTS)

WHAT ARE COAL TAR SEALANTS?

Coal tar sealants (CTS) are used to protect, maintain and beautify asphalt pavement for driveways and parking lots.

WHY ARE COAL TAR SEALANTS USED?

Asphalt pavement develops cracks over time, and sealants may help protect the pavement surface. However, CTS are only one method of maintaining pavement.

PROBLEMS WITH COAL TAR SEALANTS

- Coal tars and coal tar pitches are “*known to be human carcinogens*” according to the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
- CTS contain 3.4% to 20% polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) dry weight. PAHs are toxic to aquatic life, and several are suspected human carcinogens.
- CTS are a source of PAHs in stormwater runoff
- PAH “hot spots” are found in streams adjacent to parking lots using CTS
- CTS contribute more PAHs to runoff than viable alternatives

LIMITATIONS OF COAL TAR SEALANTS

- Tend to dry, shrink and crack with time
- Need reapplication about every 2 to 5 years, depending on wear
- Can cause surfaces to become slippery when wet

ALTERNATIVES TO COAL TAR SEALANTS

- Consider using asphalt-based sealers, which contain 0.03% to 0.66% PAHs, much less than CTS
- Evaluate using permeable asphalt, which does not need sealed and allows stormwater to infiltrate
- Explore using gravel and concrete, which do not require sealant and reduce the urban heat island effect
- Promote shared driveways and parking lots to reduce the need for paved surfaces

BE INFORMED

For more information about the effect of coal tar sealants on the environment visit http://water.usgs.gov/nawqa/asphalt_sealers.html or contact Barbara Mahler of the U.S. Geological Survey at bjmahler@usgs.gov.

BE PROACTIVE

Municipalities may choose to restrict the sale and/or use of CTS in their community. It is already happening! The City of Austin, TX and Dane County, WI have banned the use and sale of CTS. Visit http://www.cityofaustin.org/watershed/coaltar_ban.htm for more information.

BE CREATIVE

Consider the alternatives. Grid gravel and pervious concrete provide added benefits such as stormwater management, groundwater recharge, durability, and an enhanced aesthetic quality.

The Great Lakes Binational Toxics Strategy is committed to reducing or eliminating persistent toxic substances, especially those which bioaccumulate, from the Great Lakes Basin.

For more information see <http://epa.gov/greatlakes/bns/>.