

Parking lots and driveways dominate the urban landscape, most of them seal coated with products containing refined coal tar. Coal tar sealants contain high levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which are toxic to fish and other aquatic life and are a known carcinogen. Pavement sealants containing coal tar are typically applied by commercial applicators on parking lots at apartment complexes, retail centers and office buildings. It takes about 450 gallons of sealcoat to apply a single coat to one acre of parking lot. Typically two coats are applied, and applicators suggest reapplication of sealcoat every two to three years. Studies show that coal tar sealcoat products used as a means to protect asphalt pavement are a significant source of PAH contamination in our lakes, rivers, and streams. The sealant is worn off by abrasive action of traffic, degraded by weathering to particulate form, and carried away by rainfall runoff.

The Environmental Protection Agency regulates PAHs discharged as point source pollutants by industrial sources into waterways. But under the federal Clean Water Act, the EPA can't regulate pollutants carried by stormwater runoff. We are very concerned that, without this ban, new development over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone will introduce a recognized carcinogen into our Aquifer, and SAWS does not treat to remove such constituents prior to distributing water pumped from the Edwards.

Alternative products, including asphalt sealcoat and latex modified asphalt sealer, contain a far lower concentration of PAHs than coal-tar sealants. There are also newer sealants on the market whose makers claim contain virtually no PAHs. Lowes, Home Depot, and other home improvement stores have discontinued the sale of Coal Tar Sealants nationwide.

The City of Austin passed an ordinance in 2005 prohibiting the use and sale of Coal Tar Sealants. In 2012 the Edwards Aquifer Authority adopted regulations to prohibit the use of coal tar sealants near the Comal and San Marcos springs. We would like to see the Edwards Aquifer Authority ban the use, sale, or retail display of sealcoat products that contain coal tar within the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone and five miles of the contiguous Contributing Zone. Last month, the City of San Marcos followed suit by banning this product.

If the ordinance passes today, San Antonio will be the largest city in the nation to adopt such a measure. We hope that today City Council will give us cause to celebrate a big step forward in protecting San Antonio's water quality – and will act as an example by showing the rest of the nation how much the City of San Antonio values our water and the health of its citizens.