

Facts about Brake Pads and Pollution Prevention



We've got to put the
brakes on copper
pollution in the Bay!

For more information about Bay protection programs and ongoing efforts to reduce automobile-related pollution, call the Regional Water Quality Control Plant, (650) 329-2598.

 Printed on recycled paper, of course



Regional Water Quality
Control Plant

Operated by the City of Palo Alto for
the East Palo Alto Sanitary District,
Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Mountain
View, Palo Alto, and Stanford

We've got a problem. . .

In south San Francisco Bay, copper and other toxic metals threaten the health of many wildlife species. Brake pads are a major source of copper in the environment.

Disk brake pads contain varying amounts of copper and other metals (including lead and zinc). As brake pads wear, the metals end up on our roadways in the form of dust, which is washed through storm drains into local creeks and the Bay.

- ▲ Recent research shows that brake pads may be the largest single source of copper in the Bay.
- ▲ Brake pads can contain as much as 20 percent copper.
- ▲ As they wear, brake pads contribute up to 40 percent of the copper that enters the Bay through storm drains.

While we have identified the problem, the solution to brake pad-copper pollution is not obvious. A few facts are clear:

- ▲ Copper content can vary from manufacturer to manufacturer and even among pads made by the same manufacturer. The range in one study was from below .00625 percent to 20.5 percent. Apparently copper content is not essential for good braking performance.
- ▲ Low-copper and even no-copper brake pads are available for at least some models of cars.

What is Government doing about it?

The Regional Water Quality Control Plant and other regional agencies are asking federal and state environmental protection agencies to obtain a complete listing of brake pads and copper content, and to work with manufacturers to consider product reformulation. Just as soon as we have more to report on this subject, we will do our best to inform the public.

What can consumers do?

At this time local officials, auto parts stores, and vehicle service shops do not have enough information about brake pad contents to help guide consumers' purchasing decisions. Some retailers may know of a safe, low-copper or no-copper pad for your model vehicle, but this information is not always readily available.