Rep. Doggett calls for Nationwide Study on Dangers of Coal-Tar Sealants

Austin, TX- Local Congressman Lloyd Doggett (D-TX) today announced that he has written the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) calling on them to commission the National Academy of Sciences to perform a nationwide study of the dangers posed by coal-tar sealants. Coal-tar sealants are surface finishes for parking lots, driveways, and airports. An active ingredient in the sealant has been identified as a carcinogen. In November of 2005, the City of Austin banned the use of coal-tar sealants after linking local waterway contamination with use of the sealants.

"The City of Austin took a stand on this when it decided to ban the use of coal-tar sealants within the City limits," said Rep. Doggett, a senior member of the Ways and Means Committee and Health Subcommittee. "I would like communities across the Country to learn from Austin's experience with coal-tar sealants and the impact they can have on aquatic life and waterways."

Prior to the City's ban, which took effect in January of this year, an estimated 660,000 gallons of coal-tar sealant was applied annually in the Austin area alone. The sealant chemicals often run off in the rain and were linked to pollution in Barton Springs and other Austin waterways.

In 2003, in response to the City's initial concerns, Rep. Doggett's office contacted the EPA several times, including a letter to former Administrator Christine Todd Whitman, requesting information regarding the primary contact within EPA for investigating and regulating sealants.

In his most recent letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson Rep. Doggett wrote, "...[I]t is of utmost importance that a nationwide study be undertaken to determine what actions should be taken in regard to the use of coal-tar sealants across the country. At this time, I urge the EPA
to commission the National Academy of Sciences to perform a national study and report on the extent to which the presence of coal-tar sealants leads to increases in PAHs in local water sources, and the effects of exposure, on humans and our ecosystems, to these PAHs. In addition, the study should identify gaps in our scientific understanding and regulatory control of coal-tar sealants."

PAH stands for "Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons" and the EPA has described PAHs as "...highly potent carcinogens that can produce tumors in some organisms even at single doses." Asphalt based sealants do not contain PAHs.

The text of the letter is below:

January 27, 2006

Stephen Johnson
Administrator
Region 6
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building, #3000
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Mail Code: 1101A
Washington, D.C. 20460

Richard E. Greene
Regional Administrator,
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
ATTN: 6RA
1445 Ross Avenue
Dallas, TX 75202

Re: Coal-Tar Sealants and the Effects of Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons on Humans and the Environment

Dear Administrators Johnson and Greene:

I write you regarding a matter of great importance to the health of watersheds and their ecosystems in Austin, Texas and across the Nation. The City of Austin has identified coal-tar sealants-surface finishes for parking lots, driveways, and airports-as a major source of Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs). As you know, the EPA has described PAHs as "...highly potent carcinogens that can produce tumors in some organisms even at single doses."[1][1] It is with deep concern that I write to note that PAHs have been found at high enough levels in Austin's local waterways to threaten aquatic life and degrade the health of Austin's creeks.[2][2]
Since 2002, when the issue of PAH contamination and the role of coal-tar sealants first came to light in Austin, my office has contacted Region 6 staff repeatedly to determine the appropriate point of contact at the EPA to investigate and/or regulate coal-tar sealants. Despite calling several times in 2003, including facilitating a conference call with the City of Austin and the EPA, I have yet to receive an answer to this question.

In 2005, the City’s concerns led to a city-wide ban on the use of coal-tar sealants. In that same year, the United States Geological Survey published a study on the connection between parking lot sealcoats and PAHs. This study also provided citations documenting the well known adverse affect of PAHs on mammals (including humans), birds, fish, amphibians, and other animals.[3][3] With an estimated 660,000 gallons of coal-tar sealant applied annually in the Austin area alone, it is of utmost importance that a nationwide study be undertaken to determine what actions should be taken in regard to the use of coal-tar sealants across the country.

At this time, I urge the EPA to commission the National Academy of Sciences to perform a national study and report on the extent to which the presence of coal-tar sealants leads to increases in PAHs in local water sources, and the effects of exposure, on humans and our ecosystems, to these PAHs. In addition, the study should identify gaps in our scientific understanding and regulatory control of coal-tar sealants.

I appreciate your immediate response. If your reply is written, please fax it to me at 202-225-3073.

Sincerely,

Lloyd Doggett