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Workshop on coal tar, PAHs may help city

Anne P. LeHuray • April 20, 2010

The Pavement Coatings Technology Council (PCTC) agrees with the sentiment behind your editorial of April 16 ("One more opinion on coal tar") about refined tar-based sealants, expressing the desire for more information before the full City Council takes up the recommendations of the Community Involvement Committee.

It may interest you to know that PCTC recently met with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to talk about research involving refined tar-based sealants and to suggest that the USGS and PCTC jointly sponsor an independently-organized workshop to review the science. The workshop would include consideration of all relevant science related to the contribution of PAHs to the environment by refined tar-based sealants, including the original hypothesis that sealants are a significant source of PAHs in sediments advanced by Dr. [Barbara] Mahler and her colleagues as well as research to test the hypothesis carried out by other scientists.

Such is the scientific method -- a hypothesis is advanced and modified as additional information is developed to test the hypothesis. The City of Springfield might be well served by sending a representative to listen and report on the outcome of the joint workshop before preparing a resolution about sealants. If, however, the city should decide to invite Dr. Mahler to discuss the original study, the PCTC would be happy, at no cost to the City, to fund presentations by scientists who have been conducting research that may lead Dr. Mahler to modify her hypothesis. The City is already aware of work showing that the ban in Austin, Texas has

resulted in no change in either sources or amounts of PAHs in Austin's sediments.

The City might also be interested to hear about recently conducted forensic analyzes of PAHs in sediments involving studies conducted throughout the country (including data published by Dr. Mahler), that reaffirms the long-held consensus that atmospheric sources of PAHs are dominant.

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