

# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH



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### Environmental Health Section

#### **EHS Circular Letter # 2016-49**

DATE: November 1, 2016  
TO: Local Health Directors  
FROM: Brian Toal, Supervisor, Environmental and Occupational Health Assessment  
RE: Important Reminder Regarding Coal Tar Sealants for Road Repair

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The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) is aware that towns in Connecticut have a need to reseal roads and other paved surfaces and may encounter contractors who propose to use coal tar-based sealants. An example of such an application occurred over the summer of 2016 in eastern Connecticut. CT DPH recommends against the application of coal tar-based road sealants because they can increase human exposure to carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in certain outdoor and indoor settings. Fortunately there is a good alternative, an asphalt based sealant, which is low in PAHs.

#### **Background**

CT DPH developed a [Technical Brief and Fact Sheet](#) in September 2014 describing the environmental and human health risks from coal tar based sealants. (These DPH materials were based upon research by the United States Geological Survey (USGS)). USGS has been tracking the environmental release of PAHs from coal tar based sealants as they break down over time from being driven on and weathering. USGS has documented increasing PAH levels in streams, lakes, street dust and indoor house dust in relation to the recent application of this type of road sealant. PAHs are well known carcinogens that can be present in polluted air, cigarette smoke and char-broiled foods. A public health goal is to minimize PAH levels in the environment and decrease exposures to children and other human receptors. Coal tar-based road and driveway sealants represent an unnecessary source of PAHs given that there are safer alternatives. Asphalt-based sealants work well on paved surfaces and do not contain high levels of PAHs or other highly toxic chemicals.



Phone: (860) 509-7740 • Fax: (860) 509-7785  
410 Capitol Avenue, P.O. Box 340308  
Hartford, Connecticut 06134-0308  
[www.ct.gov/dph](http://www.ct.gov/dph)

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## **Example from Last Summer**

The application of a coal tar-based product in a Connecticut town came to DPH's attention in the summer of 2016. Town officials contracted with a company which offered to use a road "rejuvenator" which is a new description for such products. Inspection of the ingredients found it to contain a high percentage of coal tar. DPH contacted the USGS researchers who have been investigating coal tar-based sealants and they came to Connecticut to set up testing of the treated roads. This testing is ongoing and DPH will update our website once it is complete. However, the public health concerns and need to test could have been avoided had the town chosen an asphalt-based sealant.

## **Going Forward**

Homeowners in Connecticut looking to reseal their driveway can only buy the safer, asphalt-based product at hardware stores. However, road resurfacing and repair contractors are in some cases still using coal tar-based products. It is important for towns to inquire what product the contractor intends to use and if it is coal tar-based, request the asphalt sealant instead. If questions arise regarding specific products (such as the "road rejuvenator" example above), feel free to contact me or Gary Ginsberg at 860-509-7740, before it is applied.

cc: Suzanne Blancaflor, M.S., M.P.H., Chief  
Environmental Health Section