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San Diego Senator Hopes to Put Brakes on Bay Pollution

By: Jack Innis | Thursday, September 23, 2010 12:00:00 AM

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SAN DIEGO — Boaters weary of being singled out as sources of copper pollution in San Diego Bay may have found a sympathetic ear.



Photo by: Jack Innis photo

Where Copper Pollution REALLY Comes From — Legislation that could potentially eliminate copper from automotive brake pads by 2025, aimed at preventing copper from entering California waterways, awaits Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's signature.

A proposal from State Sen. Christine Kehoe to ban copper in automotive brakes now sits on Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's desk.

San Diego Unified Port District, marinas, recreational boaters, yacht clubs and in-water hull cleaners are under order from the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board to reduce the levels of copper in the Shelter Island Yacht Basin over the next 12 years.

The water quality board believes divers who scrub algae and other growth off boat bottoms are the chief source of copper pollution in San Diego Bay. Copper is the chief ingredient used in most antifouling hull paints. Scientists believe the copper residue falls through the water column and ends up on marina basin sea beds, where it kills marine life.

But Sen. Kehoe's proposed legislation — Senate Bill 346, introduced in February 2009 — acknowledges what many along the waterfront believe: that dust from automotive brakes washes into the bay from roadways, curbs, storm drains and outfall pipes, producing far higher levels of copper contamination than boats could ever generate.

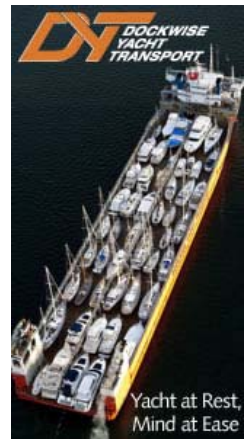
"Friction materials are an essential component of motor vehicle brake systems and of critical importance to transportation safety and the public safety in general," the bill states. "Debris from friction materials is generated and released to the surrounding environment in the course of normal brake system operation."

The bill states that friction materials including copper have been proven to be harmful when found in significant quantities in the environment. If enacted, SB 346 would limit the amount of copper in brake pads starting in 2021 and completely phase out the heavy metal by 2025. Thereafter, brake pads sold in the state would use materials less harmful to the environment.

The San Diego Unified Port District intends to limit copper sloughed off from boat bottoms by regulating hull-cleaning divers. The agency reasons the best way to minimize falling copper residue is to come up with specific hull-cleaning techniques, called Best Management Practices. The port has held a series of public outreach meetings, as well as closed-door meetings with divers, to find the best approach to drafting an ordinance regulating divers.

The water quality board and the port intend to reduce copper levels in the Shelter Island Yacht Basin by 76 percent, by 2022. A 10 percent reduction is mandated by 2012.

Shelter Island Yacht Basin, which aside from having a fuel dock is a purely recreational boating basin, was placed in the environmental limelight after a study added it to the state's Clean Water Act list of impaired water bodies in 1996.



Many recreational boaters wonder why other San Diego Bay heavy metal users, such as the Navy and industrial shipyards, are seemingly not the focus of such energetic environmental control efforts.

A decade ago, a vast undersea plume of soil-borne toxins directly off the former Campbell Shipyard site was found to be so dense that remediation was considered impossible, given economic constraints.

Campbell Shipyard, adjacent to the convention center on Eighth Avenue and Harbor Drive, built and repaired small ships and private yachts between 1926 and 1999.

As part of a redevelopment plan, the Campbell Shipyard-area plume was reportedly capped with 4 feet of mud, effectively entombing toxins under the bed of the bay.

*This article first appeared in the **September 2010** issue of **The Log Newspaper**. All or parts of the information contained in this article might be outdated.*

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