

**City of Racine, Wisconsin  
Office of the Mayor**



City Hall  
Office of Mayor Mason  
730 Washington Ave  
Racine WI 53403  
262 636-9111  
262-636-9570 FAX

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**CONTACT:**  
Cara Pratt  
262-822-8956

## **City of Racine Passes Ordinance Banning the Sale, Application, and Use of Coal Tar Sealant Products**

On Friday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> at 9:00 am in Colbert Park, Mayor Cory Mason will sign “Ordinance 0021-19 – Sale, Application, and Use of Coal Tar Sealant Products” into effect.

The City of Racine is the second largest Wisconsin city to pass a coal tar sealant ban.

Coal tar-based sealants are coatings typically applied to driveways and parking lots, and they are a major source of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) a known carcinogen. Studies conducted by Clean Wisconsin indicate that coal-tar-based sealants are a primary source of PAHs in the Root River.

“Studies have already shown elevated levels of PAHs in the waterways of Racine, and bans on coal tar sealant products in other municipalities haven been effective in reducing the presence of these chemicals,” said ordinance-sponsor **Alderwoman Natalia Taft**.

When Clean Wisconsin’s team tested various sites along the Root River in 2018, Colbert Park was the site with the highest readings of PAH contamination in the city.

“Children exposed to coal tar sealant have a cancer risk that is 14 times higher than average and coal tar sealant releases pollution into waterways that is similar to PCBs and DDT,” said **Jon Richards**, a consultant for Clean Wisconsin and Lakeshore Natural Resource Partners. “Racine is protecting children and Lake Michigan by banning coal tar sealant. It has joined the growing list of communities on Lake Michigan that have taken this important step.”

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources considers the Root River to be “impaired” based on the presence of one or more pollutants and associated quality impacts. However, the Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network has been implementing the Root River Watershed Restoration Plan since 2016, a plan that extends until 2024.

“Continuing to improve the water quality of the Root River is essential to promoting healthy ecosystems,” said **Mayor Cory Mason**. “The City of Racine’s Department of Public Works committed to using asphalt-based sealants, a less toxic alternative to tar-based sealants, years ago.”

“The Public Health Department is supportive of the ban on coal tar sealcoat products within the City of Racine, due to their extremely high concentrations of PAHs, which have been classified as known human carcinogens. PAHs, along with lead, accumulate in dust and sediments, where they can be ingested by children, some of our most vulnerable residents,” said **Julie Kinzelman**, Laboratory Director of the City of Racine’s Public Health Department. “This ordinance is another example of our continuing commitment to the protection of public health within the community.”

PAHs are considerably common in the environment, especially in urban environments. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services notes that “all of us are exposed to PAHs every day in the air we breathe and the food we eat. Our metabolism is adapted to handle these frequent low-level exposures” but “skin that comes in contact with PAHs should be washed immediately with soap.”

The passing of this ordinance is timed to coincide with the annual Root River Festival this Sunday, August 25<sup>th</sup>, at the Root River Environmental Education Community Center.