Governor signs bills to clean up Puget Sound, protect the environment

Local News

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OLYMPIA- Governor Chris Gregoire signed into law two new bills passed by the Washington State Legislature that will significantly help restore and protect the environmental health of Puget Sound.

Senate Bill 6557 limits the amount of copper and other toxic metals in vehicle brake pads. The limit on copper will be set at 5 percent and go into effect in 2021. The Washington Department of Ecology, with input from an expert advisory committee, will evaluate alternatives before a more stringent limit goes into effect. Copper in vehicle brake pad dust is toxic to aquatic life, including salmon. Brake pads are a significant source of copper. Rainwater runoff washes brake pad dust from roads into streams and rivers that flow into Puget Sound. Washington is the first state in the nation to phase out copper brake pads.

As a result of Senate Bill 6350, an interagency team will provide recommendations about how to use marine spatial planning in Washington. Marine spatial planning is a tool to support comprehensive decisions for managing coastal and ocean environments. The bill also sends an important signal to the federal government about Washington’s increased commitment to the health of our marine waters, working in coordination with federal, state and tribal governments, coastal communities and stakeholders.

“I hope other states follow our lead in protecting the environment from toxics that harm marine life and our food chain, and help us prepare to better manage our marine resources for the future,” said Governor Chris Gregoire.

“These new laws will be a great help as we continue to implement the Puget Sound Action Agenda,” said David Dicks, executive director of the Puget Sound Partnership. “Washington is now the first state in the nation to begin the phase out of copper brake pads, which are a significant source of toxic materials in our environment, threatening the health of our streams, rivers and marine environment, particularity our threatened and endangered salmon.”

“The marine spatial planning bill makes our state a national leader on this issue. This proactive approach also puts us in a favorable position to receive federal funding to implement this important program,” said Dicks.

“We continue to lead the nation in protecting our environment for future generations. The brake pad bill shows that the products we use in our daily lives shouldn’t, and don’t have to, also harm the environment. We’re taking another step toward controlling the sources of pollution, so we don’t have to clean them up once they get into the environment,” said Ecology Director Ted Sturdevant. “We’re also getting a better understanding of our marine waters so we can grow and live alongside them without causing damage.”

“The Sound and our beautiful coastal waters are so critical to everyone in this state. We must do everything in our power to protect the precious environmental and economic resources,” said Sen. Kevin Ranker, D-San Juan Island, the prime sponsor of both measures. “These bills will go a long way toward keeping our waters clean and their usage fair, and I appreciate the strong support in the House, particularly from my seatmate, Representative Jeff Morris.”

“The passage of these bills is a great example of how varied interests can come together to help all of us in Washington. Puget Sound is a statewide resource and a treasure that we can and must protect and restore,” said Rep. Dave Upthegrove, D-Des Moines.

The phase out provision of this bill will allow brake pad manufacturers to follow an orderly process to ensure public safety as new materials are integrated in to the design and manufacturing of vehicle brake pads.

The copper brake pads legislation passed with the help of a collaborative approach involving the Puget Sound Partnership, Ecology, vehicle brake pad manufacturers and distributors, the automobile industry, environmental groups and other business interests.