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[Ecology home](#) > [News](#) > News Release

## Department of Ecology News Release - January 21, 2015

# Washington brakes law serves as national model Manufacturers, states, EPA sign agreement to reduce copper in brake pads

OLYMPIA – Washington’s drive to protect salmon and other aquatic species became a national model today as brake manufacturers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and an association of states signed an agreement based on Washington’s low-copper standards.

Even in low concentrations, copper is toxic to salmon and other fish, interfering with their ability to avoid predators and return to their spawning streams. The Washington Legislature passed the [Better Brakes Law](#) in 2010 to reduce the amount of copper and other toxic chemicals in brake pads. California passed a similar law at the same time.

Since then, the Washington Department of Ecology has worked closely with brake manufacturers and other stakeholders to agree on a plan to reduce copper in brake pads below 5 percent by 2021 and below 0.5 percent by 2025.

“It’s exciting to see the partnership Washington developed with brake manufacturers set the stage for a national agreement,” said Ecology Director Maia Bellon. “This is a big step in the right direction to reduce copper, protect fish and improve our environment.”

[Brake manufacturers](#) are reformulating their proprietary brake friction materials to ensure quality, performance and safety while meeting the reduced copper standard. Representatives from several vehicle industry groups, including brake manufacturers, signed a memorandum of understanding, or MOU, with the EPA and the Environmental Council of the States at the SAE International 2015 Government/Industry Meeting today in Washington, D.C.

“This historic MOU will provide the motor vehicle industry with consistent copper reduction guidelines and eliminate the potential for disparate state regulations,” said Steve Handschuh, president and CEO of the Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association (MEMA), one of the key industry associations involved with the effort. “This has been a proactive, collaborative effort by regulatory agencies, states, the automotive aftermarket and the motor vehicle industry to reduce copper in U.S. waterways.”

In urban areas, brake pads account for up to half of the copper entering our waterways. In Washington, brake pads release about 250,000 pounds of copper to the environment each year. When Washington’s Better Brakes Law is fully implemented in 2025, this source of copper will be virtually eliminated.

“Reducing copper levels won’t singlehandedly fix the challenges facing salmon in Puget Sound, but it will remove one of the barriers to their recovery,” said John Stark, director of the Washington Stormwater Center.

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