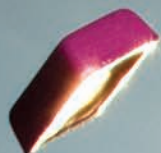


ENVIRONMENT: WAX ON, WAX OFF? PURL WAX CHIMES IN ON THE EFFECTS YOUR WAX MIGHT HAVE ON THE ENVIRONMENT



Avid ski waxers take note: The wax you are most likely using to speed up your boards is harming the environment and could be causing health problems in humans. Scott Sparks and Purl Wax are aiming to do something about that.

The vast majority of waxes on the market today are made with perfluorocarbons, which, once used, break down into perfluorooctanoic acid, which has been linked to birth defects and liver damage. This acid gets into water sources when snow melts and the wax residue goes with it.

The same acid that is created when a fluorocarbon wax is broken down is also found in Teflon, the substance that lets you easily get the leftover macaroni and cheese out of the pan after three weeks. The perfluorooctanoic acid has been named by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a human carcinogen that, thanks to the use of Teflon and to a much lesser extent, ski wax, is in the blood stream of almost every American.

"The process (of traditional wax) is just wrong," says Sparks, owner and founder of Purl Wax. "It starts, first of all, in the petroleum industry. You have a petroleum refinery; they're drilling for oil, they de-oil, and they're left over with a paraffin, or hydrocarbon wax. So you're putting this toxic stuff on the base of your skis to go faster that comes from the petroleum industry, but it comes off of your skis, gets in the water system and stays there. The fluorocarbons don't break down for 50,000 years."

The greenhouse warming potential of fluorocarbons is 6,000 times greater than carbon dioxide.

Once Scott realized how harmful ski wax and its byproducts are, not to mention the petroleum industry he didn't like supporting, he set out to create something different. He started with a soy-based product that was hydrogenated but there were no bonds holding the product together. Carbon molecules bond together in traditional wax creating a hydrocarbon chain that makes it durable. A soy-based wax breaks down after one run; it isn't bonded in the same structural manner, and therefore did not accomplish the goal of finding a product that was bio-degradable and as effective as traditional waxes. Swing and a miss.

But enter bio-ester. Bio-ester is bonded just like a hydrocarbon chain of molecules but is made of all-natural resources, mainly grain and vegetable stock, which are all renewable. The end result is a product that is effective and durable, without producing harmful byproducts.

With an environment-safe wax under his belt, Scott set out to ensure that everything his company produces, including the packaging, is made with the same mentality. As an example, the velvet bags that the wax comes in are fully reusable, and Sparks encourages consumers to send the bags back to the company so he can reuse them for another bar of wax.

"We want to minimize waste on all levels," he says. "If you send back a dozen velvet bags, we'll either reuse them or I'll cut them up and make a velvet jacket (laughs). But point being, it doesn't go in the trash."

—Nicole Birkhold