PAVEMENT DEPOT

Your Questions About Asphalt Emulsion Sealer — Answered

For Contractors Making the Switch from Coal Tar

We know what you're thinking. You've used coal tar for years, it's worked, and now you're being told to switch. Fair enough — here are straight answers to the questions we're already hearing from contractors.

The Ban & The Change

Q: Coal tar was banned? I hadn't heard anything official.

A: Yes, the ban on coal tar emulsion sealer is in effect across Canada due to high concentrations of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) — compounds linked to health and environmental harm. This is not a phase-out or a recommendation — **it is a ban.** You cannot legally purchase or apply coal tar emulsion sealer for residential or commercial pavement work in Canada.

Q: Is this temporary? Will coal tar come back?

A: No. This is a permanent regulatory change. Everything west of the Mississippi River in the US has been under similar bans for years. Canada has caught up. Asphalt emulsion is the standard for sealcoating in most of North America, and that's not changing.

Product Quality & Performance

Q: I tried asphalt emulsion years ago and didn't like the results.

A: That's actually a really common response — and it's a fair one based on what was available 20 years ago. The early AE products in the Midwest and Canada were made with raw materials from the western US that weren't suited to our climate. They underperformed. But the product has been completely re-engineered since then. Different raw materials, different emulsification agents, different viscosity profiles. The AE of today is not the AE you tried in 2000. If you're still judging it based on that experience, you owe it to yourself to try it again.

> "The AE of today isn't the AE of yesterday. The old wives' tale you heard about it 20 years ago no longer applies. You're not driving a Model T talking about the suspension — air ride suspension exists now. Same argument."
>
> — **Anthony,** Michigan sealcoating contractor with 15+ years exclusive AE experience

Coverage Rate

Q: Will the coverage rate hurt my profitability?

No. Modern asphalt emulsion sealer delivers approximately **100 square feet per gallon** in diluted, ready-to-use form — equal to or better than what most contractors were getting from coal tar. If you're used to over-diluting your coal tar to stretch coverage, you'll need to recalibrate that habit. But with properly diluted AE, the numbers work out.

Tire Marks

Q: What about tire marks? That's a big complaint from my customers.

Tire marks have improved dramatically with modern AE formulations. Contractors who've used it for years say tire marks are basically a thing of the past. The improvement is real — especially when you add a polymer additive like Top Tuff, which hardens the film surface and resists the shear from turning tires. Shoulder season applications and proper cure time are the other factors.

Colour

Q: Is the colour different? Will my customers notice?

Fresh AE sealer can look slightly different in tone compared to coal tar — it may appear a bit more brown-tinged when wet. Once fully cured, the finish is a **deep black** that looks the same to customers. The colour difference during the job itself is minimal and most customers won't notice once it's done.

Application Concerns: Equipment

One of the most common concerns contractors have is whether their existing equipment will work with AE. Here's what you need to know.

Q: I heard AE is harder to work with — pumps clog, it's thick, it's a nightmare.

A: This was true of older AE formulations. Manufacturers have invested heavily in reducing viscosity without sacrificing solids content. The material flows better than it used to through diaphragm pump setups. That said — Polymer Modified AE such as PMM does **NOT** work through centrifugal or banjo pumps. If you're running that type of equipment, you'll need to upgrade to a diaphragm pump. This is a one-time equipment investment that actually improves your overall operation.

Q: My current pump is a centrifugal unit. Will I need to buy new equipment?

A: If you're looking to use a polymer modified asphalt emulsion sealer — whether that's PMM or any other polymer modified product on the market — you will need a diaphragm pump. Centrifugal pumps can't handle polymer modified materials correctly. However, if you're running a centrifugal pump and aren't ready to make that equipment change, a standard asphalt emulsion sealer without polymers is fully compatible with your existing setup. Several options are available from various suppliers. It comes down to matching the right sealer to your equipment.

Polymer Modified AE

- Dual diaphragm pump (hydraulic or mechanical)

Base AE without Polymers or Sand

- Centrifugal pumps
- Banjo pumps
- Dual diaphragm pump (hydraulic or mechanical)

Application Concerns: Technique

1 Does AE forgive shortcuts like coal tar did?

Honest answer: No. AE rewards proper application and punishes shortcuts. If you over-dilute it, it will fail. If you spray heavy coats in shaded areas without enough heat to cure, it will fail. If you don't agitate and your sand settles, you'll get inconsistent results. BUT — this is actually a good thing for contractors who do the job right. Those who cut corners will struggle. Professionals who follow the guidelines will produce results that last and build their reputation.

2 What's different about applying it in shaded areas?

This is one of the most important practical differences. Coal tar was tolerant of cool, shaded surfaces. AE is not. In any area that doesn't get direct sun — building shadows, overhangs, tree cover — you should **BRUSH the material rather than spray it.** Brushing controls the application thickness and ensures the sealer sets properly even on a cooler surface. Spraying a heavy coat in the shade and hoping it cures is how you get failures.

3 What temperature can I apply AE?

Both the pavement surface and air temperature need to be **50°F (10°C) and rising.** A good field check: lay your forearm flat on the pavement. If it feels cold compared to your skin, wait. Early morning applications in cool weather need extra caution — especially in shaded spots. In peak summer heat, make sure you're diluting enough (especially with concentrate formulas) as water evaporates fast from a black tank.

Two-Coat Commercial Work

Q: I do a lot of two-coat work on commercial lots. Is the process different?

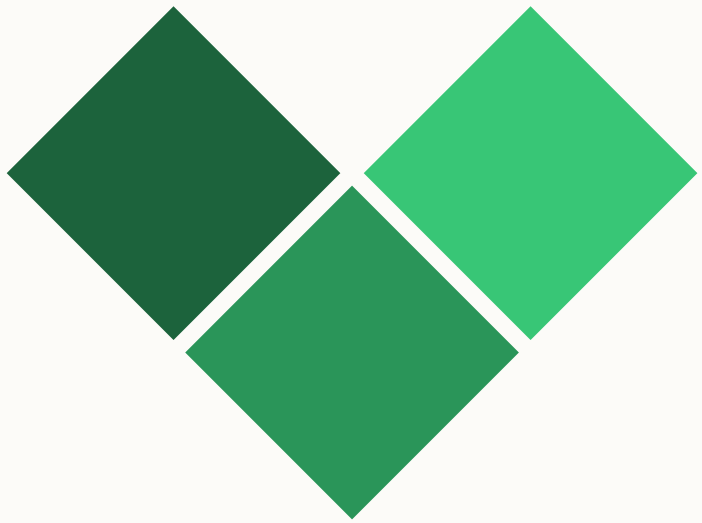
Actually, AE is **better suited for two-coat jobs** than coal tar was. Coal tar took 17–21 days to fully off-gas its contaminants. Putting a second coat on too soon would trap those contaminants and cause peeling. That problem doesn't exist with AE — when it looks dry, it's cured.

First Coat — Partial

Apply 70–80% of a full coat uniformly.

Second Coat — Full

Apply the complete full-strength second coat.



Dry & Test

Wait at least 4 hours and perform scuff test.

For two coats: apply the first coat lighter (about 70–80% of a full coat), wait a minimum of 4 hours, do the scuff test, then apply the full second coat. The elimination of the off-gassing wait period is a genuine operational advantage over coal tar for commercial work.

Your Business & Your Customers

Q: How do I explain the change to my customers?

Keep it simple. The product has changed because of regulations, the new product is better for the environment and safer for your crew and their family.. Most customers care about the result — a clean, black, sealed asphalt surface that lasts. That's still what they're getting. You don't need to go into detail about PAHs unless they ask.

Suggested Customer Script

Suggested talking points for your customers:

- "We've upgraded to asphalt emulsion sealer — it's the new industry standard across Canada and most of the US."
- "It's a safer, cleaner product with no harsh chemicals, and it performs just as well."
- "The cure time is actually faster, so you'll be back on your driveway/parking lot sooner than before."

Q: Will this hurt my business competitively?

The ban applies to everyone — no competitor can legally use coal tar either. **The playing field has been levelled.** The contractors who get ahead of the learning curve, invest in the right equipment, and apply AE properly will have a competitive advantage over those who are still figuring it out.

Q: Is AE safer for my crew?

Significantly. Coal tar causes real, documented health issues — skin burns from sun exposure, severe eye reactions from misting, long-term PAH exposure risks. AE is water-based and much less caustic. Your crew can work with it in normal conditions without the same risk of injury. Cleanup is easier too — just water.

Storage & Shelf Life

Q: Can I store leftover AE sealer over the winter?

A: Yes, as long as it is stored **indoors and does not freeze.** Agitate thoroughly before use in spring. Be aware that material stored for months will have had more opportunity for bacteria to develop — check for a sulphur or rotten-egg smell before you load it. **Do not move stored leftover product back into your bulk tank** — this is the most common source of bacteria contamination.

Q: How often should I be cleaning filters and basket strainers?

A: Every day. Swap your basket strainer at the end of the day, soak the used one overnight in a bucket of water, and scrape it clean in the morning. It takes a few minutes, and saves you an enormous amount of grief when a clogged strainer kills your flow mid-job.

Dealing with Bacteria in Your Tank

⚠️ **If your tank smells like rotten eggs — that's bacteria. Treat it immediately.**

Mix 1 part pool shock (standard pool chlorine) with 1 part water and add to the tank. The ratio is:

1:1	1 gal	4 gal	30–45
Pool Shock to Water	Per 1,000 Gallons	Example: Half-Full 8,000-Gal Tank	Minutes to Agitate
Mix equal parts pool shock and water before adding to tank	1 gallon pool shock per 1,000 gallons of material in the tank	4 gallons pool shock diluted in 4 gallons of water	Pour it in, agitate for 30–45 minutes, and the bacteria will be dead

⚠️ **Do not fill the tank all the way up while treating** — bacteria creates volume as it reacts and material can overflow.

Still Have Questions?

Reach out by phone, email or visit us in store any time. We stock **PMM** and **Masterseal** — two quality asphalt emulsion sealers manufactured by Seal Master. Both are examples of what the market offers; other AE manufacturers also make competitive products.

Spec Sheets & SDS

Spec sheets and Safety Data Sheets for all products we carry are available at the counter.

Carry Your SDS in Your Truck

It covers PAH levels, application data, and dilution rates, and it's useful if you're ever questioned on a job site.

Visit Pavement Depot

Our team is here to help you make the switch confidently. Come in and talk to us — we've heard every question and we have straight answers.

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