

California produces more than 51-million waste tires a year.

Up until a few decades ago, piles of illegally dumped tires polluted our state. Sometimes catching fire; burning deep inside the pile.

Heung: "Because tires have such a low conductivity, once a tire gets hot enough to burn, it's actually pretty hard to cool down."

In 1998, an employee clearing weeds at a property illegally storing about 7 million tires in San Joaquin County, sparked one of the largest tire fires in our nation's history.

Large plumes of toxic black smoke from the "Tracy Tire Fire" released dangerous chemicals like cyanide and carbon monoxide, while it burned for more than two years.

Heung: "It really was a wakeup call for California that something had to be done."

After several more massive tire fires, California turned to waste tire management and recycling; strengthening the decade old Tire Recycling Act in 2000, to put waste tires to better use.

Heung: "CalRecycle's role is to find new ways to recycle tires to prevent them from being either illegally dumped or thrown into landfills."

California now tracks the storage and movement of used tires and supports recycling and market development to encourage the use of products made from recycled tires.

Heung: "CalRecycle promotes lots of tire derived products. We have a pretty extensive catalog online that shows everything a waste tire can become."

CalRecycle's Tire Incentive Program (TIP) provides financial incentives to eligible manufacturers that make new products from old tires.

Heung: "Two of the products my team promotes include Rubberized Asphalt Concrete, and Tire Derived Aggregate."

TDA used as vibration mitigation under light rail, has saved the state millions of dollars while it absorbs sound and allows for a smoother ride through neighborhoods.

Heung: "With TDA, you're actually solving engineering problems."

Rubberized asphalt concrete blends recycled tires and asphalt to create a more cost effective, durable, and environmentally-friendly alternative to traditional paving materials.

Other tire derived products use ground-up, recycled tires mixed with other materials to create products like flooring, roofing, traffic control devices, and pathways.

Will: “In a lot of ways, waste tire products outperform conventional materials, but using tires can often save money as well.”

In 2019, these innovative solutions helped California recycle more than 19 million waste tires, or about 37-percent, into new recycled products.

California has made great strides in finding better uses for tires, but with 42-percent or 21.5 million tires being burned for tire-derived fuel, either within the state or shipped overseas primarily to Asia, and more than 9 million tires still buried in landfills every year...

Will: “We still have a lot of work to do.”

There’s more work on the road ahead.