How to make an EV tire that won’t pollute the environment

Congratulations, world. We’ve done it. Since passing the Clean Air Act in the 1970s, we’ve reduced cancer-causing particulate emissions from our cars and other sources dramatically, a change that has added years to our lives.

That’s the good news. The bad news is that we can now spend more time focusing on the remaining sources, including some unexpected ones. In an EV era, tires are becoming the greatest emitters of particulate matter, and as we’ve seen, whether it’s the microplastics in our shrimp or the preservatives in our salmon, they’re having a disturbing impact on our environment.

In an EV era, tires are becoming the greatest emitters of particulate matter

Gunnlaugur Erlendsson wants to do something about that. The affable Icelander founded Enso to tackle what he saw as a developing need for better EV tires. The UK-based company’s next big step is coming close to home: a $500 million US tire factory specifically for building eco-friendly tires for EVs.

Well, eco-friendlier, anyway.

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underline-gray-63″>*A rendering of Enso’s proposed factory.*

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>More life, less pollution

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What makes Enso’s tires different? Erlendsson was light on the technical details but promised 10 percent lower rolling resistance than regular tires, equating to a commensurate range increase. That’ll make your EV cheaper to run, while a 35 percent increase in tire life means lower wear, fewer particulates in the air, and fewer old tires sent to the incinerator, where half of all American tires go to die.

Enso’s new factory will also handle recycling. It will be truly carbon neutral, not reliant on carbon offsets, and manufacture tires out of recycled carbon black and tire silica made from rice husks.

But what about 6PPD, the troubling tire preservative that’s shown up in our fish and even our bodies? Enso is still using it, but its days are numbered.

Making tires out of recycled carbon black and tire silica made from rice husks

“All tire companies in the world are using 6PPD in their current production tires,” Erlendsson said. “The technology to remove 6PPD exists,” he added, but he declined to discuss the topic further, claiming restrictions due to signed NDAs. Research bodies in both California and Washington state have provided early assessments of alternatives, but none look to

be a silver bullet that will save our tires without destroying the environment.

The use of 6PPD is still permitted, but the EPA has recently issued new guidelines for monitoring its presence, and earlier this year, Washington state passed a bill regulating its use. More restrictions are coming, which Enso says it welcomes.

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