



Auto industry fails the Swan

by STEPHEN POLLOCK

THIRTY per cent of Bayswater's light industry is failing to meet official environmental standards, exposing the Swan River to harmful pollutants and toxins.

Figures released by the Perth Region Natural Resource Management (NRM) show that of 693 businesses audited, 195 had non-compliant issues including wastewater disposal, handling of contaminated material and lack of spill kits.

Worst was the automotive/mechanical sector, including panel beaters, wreckers and boat builders, 58 per cent failing the audit.

Importantly, 97 per cent of businesses became compliant following the audits, and after the NRM issued recommendations on what action to take to improve.

NRM project co-ordinator Peter Male says chemicals used in the automotive industry are particularly harmful to the environment.

"Oils, coolants and degreasers seep into workshop drains, which then travel into the main drains and ultimately the Swan River," he says.

"Over time they form a nasty toxic sludge in the river which impacts the food chain.

"Often businesses are unaware of the damage they are causing and we educate them on environmental solutions."

The NRM light industry audit program started in 2005 with \$2.7 million federal funding.

It funded eight councils, including Bayswater, in a 2.5-year pilot program.

Once the federal money dried up councils



were left to themselves, resulting in plummeting audit numbers.

Bayswater is one of the few councils to continue with the scheme and aims to audit 350 businesses a year.

So far Perth Region NRM has audited 7000.

"Our funding comes to an end this June and unless we can secure some cash from the Department of Environment and Conservation it will be back to local councils doing it themselves," CEO Linda Soteriou says.

Maylands Labor MP Lisa Baker is lobbying the Barnett government to fund the program.

"Last year the government cut the Swan River Trust's funding by a staggering \$1 million," she says.

Simone Knox, media bugle for WA environment minister Bill Marmion, was keeping mum: "The specific details about what is included in this year's budget will be provided on budget day."