

Changes For Traction Industry Possible

By Lynn Kelflor

Traction product makers, sellers and users may have to untwist studs from their tracks. The question now is when.

A Joint Conference Committee of the Minnesota State Legislature is deciding how to incorporate traction product legislation into a bill. At press time, the committee had not come to a decision. Whatever the decision, though, it could mean changes for those in the traction industry.

The original wording, and the one approved by the Minnesota Senate, called for a stud ban on all paved surfaces. This would have included road crossings and all paved trails. The House, however, amended the bill to study the effect of traction products on paved surfaces over the next two years.

Since the traction legislation is part of a much larger bill, it may take a couple of weeks before any decisions are announced. This same bill also includes legislation covering personal watercraft.

Rob Musseman, president of Hope, Mich.-based International Engineering and Manufacturing, which makes Woody's brand traction products, isn't too worried about the outcome. He also strongly feels that there will be the two-year study period.

"If everybody thinks this will bury us, they're wrong," Musseman said. "Minnesota is the second largest state in terms of snowmobile owners in the nation, but there are more than 1.3 million snowmobiles registered in the U.S. alone."

Minnesotans account for 275,000 snowmobiles.

Where a traction product ban would hurt, he said, was within racing and the support traction product companies give to racers. A traction ban, he predicts, would also do immeasurable damage to the amount of revenue snowmobilers pump into rural Minnesota.

"I wouldn't want to be the head of the Department of Tourism if that passed," he said.

The language of the proposal was changed to specify traction products used on snowmobile tracks, said Greg Sorenson, president of Minnesota United Snowmobilers Association. "We don't have to worry about carbides," Sorenson said.

The proposal was brought about by the Minnesota Senate Environment Finance Committee.

"At this point, we don't oppose a ban because of the damage to paved trails," said Nancy Prouder, of the Enforcement office for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

What happens in Minnesota could set a precedent for neighboring states, said Sorenson.

Michigan legislators have come down on the side of supporting traction product use, said Musseman, but Wisconsin decision-makers are willing to see what happens in its westerly neighbor.

"From a safety standpoint, there is a place for studs especially in southern part of state where the trails are more icy," said Vic Kosman, a regional training officer for the Minnesota DNR.

"I run a 600, use carbide wear rods, wouldn't do without them," Kos-

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