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Michigan Joins National Program for Mercury Auto Switch Recovery

Michigan is one of the first states joining a new voluntary national initiative intended to capture mercury switches from automobiles and light trucks before they are flattened, shredded, and melted to make new steel. This new initiative, called the National Vehicle Mercury Switch Recovery Program, is expected to help cut mercury air emissions by up to 75 tons over the next 15 years.

While automakers have stopped using mercury switches in the manufacture of new vehicles, the U.S. EPA estimates that 67 million switches are in vehicles still on the road. Mercury switches can be found in the convenience lights in trunk and hood compartments and in anti-lock brakes of some vehicles built as late as 2002.

Over the past seven years, the Department of Environmental Quality led several research and pilot projects in conjunction with the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers. In August 2004, the DEQ became the first state environmental agency in the nation to enter into a voluntary, cooperative agreement with automobile manufacturers to conduct a statewide collection program for the recovery of mercury automotive switches from end-of-life vehicles. Through the Michigan Mercury Switch Sweep Program, nearly 70,000 mercury switches have already been recovered from scrapped vehicles, which could have otherwise released mercury to the environment.

While the state's program has resulted in some mercury switch removals, the DEQ is encouraging automotive recyclers to participate in this new national program.

"Michigan has been a leader in this important effort to keep Mercury out of our environment, and we are now pleased to be one of the first states to join this new program," said DEQ Director Steven E. Chester. "I am hopeful that Michigan's automotive recyclers will continue to assist in this effort to keep our environment clean, and our families healthy."

The new national program will be managed by End of Life Vehicle Solutions, a not-for-profit corporation formed by the Alliance which has agreed to provide automobile recyclers with educational materials, as well as provide for the collection and recycling of automotive switches. Recyclers will receive a collection bucket, updated educational materials regarding mercury switch removal, a list of vehicles with the potential to contain mercury switches, and instructions for shipping the ELVS buckets. When recyclers are ready to return full buckets of switches, ELVS will provide them with additional/or replacement buckets as requested, at no cost.

For additional information about the new national program, log on to the ELVS Web site at: www.elvsolutions.org.

For general questions concerning mercury, contact the DEQ's Environmental Assistance Center at 1-800-662-9278.

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Editor's note: DEQ news releases are available on the department's Internet home page at www.michigan.gov/deq.

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