

For Immediate Release

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Groups Demand that GM Fulfill its Obligation to Recover Mercury From Old Vehicles

Today, environment groups expressed concern and dismay with the "new" General Motors (GM) claim that it's not responsible for funding the recycling of mercury switches from its old vehicles. The groups are demanding that the company continue meeting its obligations to fund legacy mercury recovery costs from GM end-of-life vehicles.

“GM should not be hiding behind a bankruptcy proceeding as an excuse for not meeting its on-going obligation to fund a vital program for keeping mercury out of the environment,” said Charles Griffith, Director of the Ecology Center’s Clean Car Campaign.

According to the industry estimates, 54% of all vehicles containing mercury are GM models. Therefore, it appears that GM is responsible for funding half the costs of the industry collection program nationally.

GM's lack of financial support detracts further from an overall lack of financing necessary for the national program to operate effectively, say advocates. Last month, a separate fund that helped pay financial incentives to auto dismantlers for turning in switches ran out of cash.

Furthermore, GM has denied responsibility for paying state mandated incentives for the collection of auto mercury switches. Ten states have passed mercury switch legislation requiring automakers to pay for switch recycling and provide incentives to auto dismantlers for collecting switches.

By not paying bounties mandated by states, GM is also jeopardizing the effectiveness of state programs as well, say advocates.

“GM’s latest maneuver throws a monkey wrench into state programs-- if they stop paying bounties,” said Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project.

In addition, the recently adopted federal "Cash for Clunkers" program is also causing further difficulties for the programs, because a lot more vehicles are also now being retired.

"With Cash for Clunkers adding more mercury-containing vehicles to the end-of-life pool, it’s extremely unfortunate timing for the major financial supporter to be walking away from the table," stated Griffith.

Mercury switches were used to operate hood and trunk convenience lights in vehicles made before 2004, when automakers stopped their use. Upwards of 100 million of these devices were used in vehicles.

Unless they are removed first, the mercury from auto switches is released to the air when vehicles are recycled at steel mills. This source contributes to both local and global mercury pollution and contamination of fish.

More information:

<http://ecocenter.org/newsletter/ecolink/mar08/#switch>

www.mercurypolicy.org

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