

The Clean Car Campaign is Coordinated by:

- Environmental Defense •
- American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy •
- Ecology Center • Great Lakes United •
- Michigan Environmental Council • Union of Concerned Scientists •

Clean Car Standard

The Clean Car Campaign encourages automakers to produce vehicles meeting these standards:

- 50% more fuel-efficient than other vehicles in its class
- Meets California's stringent tailpipe emission standard (SULEV)
- Cleanly manufactured using non-toxic, recyclable materials

Over 100,000 people have signed this pledge:

“The next time I shop for a new car or truck, I pledge to buy the greenest vehicle available that meets my needs and fits my budget. I challenge the auto industry to give me the choice to purchase a vehicle that meets the Clean Car Standard.”

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DRIVING FORWARD

News from the Clean Car Campaign



Photo by Tom Corbett

Switch the Switch

For years the Mercury brand has been used to sell automobiles, while the element mercury has invisibly and unnecessarily come along for the ride in many U.S. makes and models. Unfortunately, let loose in the environment, mercury can cause serious health problems for people, especially young children, making it one element the automotive industry can do without.

Kids at risk

From conception to age six, mercury poses serious problems. In fact, according to the Center for Disease Control, over 375,000 children born in the U.S. each year are at risk for neurodevelopment problems — from mild learning disabilities to mental retardation — because of exposure to mercury in the womb.

The Clean Car Campaign encourages auto makers to provide drivers with greener vehicle choices.

People are most directly exposed to mercury through the food they eat, specifically fish. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, about 7 million women and children are eating unsafe levels of mercury-contaminated fish. To date, 41 states have issued advisories warning people to restrict their consumption of fish from certain lakes, streams, and rivers that are contaminated with mercury.

Although mercury does occur naturally, there is growing cause for alarm. Human activities, including auto manufacturing and disposal, have increased mercury concentrations in the environment to unhealthy levels.

Mercury on board?

Over the years, the automotive industry has used mercury in a variety of applications, most commonly electrical switches for convenience lights and 4WD antilock brakes. The mercury contained in a single switch, however, is enough to contaminate a 20-acre lake. In 1995, 14 million switches – representing nearly 12 tons of mercury – were built into new cars and trucks manufactured by General Motors, Ford and Chrysler (now DaimlerChrysler). That same year, the Big Three automakers pledged to phase out the use of mercury switches in their new cars and trucks as early as 1997 – something foreign automakers accomplished back in 1993.

Despite this promise and the availability of practical, low-cost, mercury-free alternatives, the U.S. automakers were slow to act. Ford only completed its mercury switch phase-out in 2001, and GM and DaimlerChrysler continue to use mercury switches in a limited number of vehicles. Further aggravating the mercury problem, all

Effects of Mercury Exposure In Children

Mild effects - poor performance on tests for attention, fine-motor function, language, visual-spatial abilities, and verbal memory.

Extreme effects - mental retardation, cerebral palsy, deafness, and blindness.

In addition to the impacts on children, exposed adults can exhibit impaired sensory and cognitive ability, tremors, and the inability to walk.

Source: National Research Council, Toxicological Effects of Methylmercury (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000).

three U.S. automakers are introducing new applications of mercury in vehicles that are gaining in popularity, including mercury-vapor headlamps and back-lit instrument panels. In model year 2000, U.S. passenger vehicles still contained more than 10,000 pounds of mercury.

Even if the auto industry does eventually honor its pledge, phasing out mercury from new vehicles does not address the mercury problem that remains on the road. America's existing vehicle fleet contains an estimated 150 tons of mercury. In the U.S. approximately 11 million vehicles are retired and recycled each year. With no effective removal and management system in place, the mercury-containing components of these vehicles remain unaccounted for, meaning that much (if not all) of this mercury may end up in the environment. By one estimate, 10 tons of mercury was released into the environment in 2000 alone from these older vehicles.

What's being done?

The Clean Car Campaign believes it is the automakers' responsibility to remove and properly manage the mercury contained in their products. We are calling for the immediate elimination of all automotive uses of mercury in new cars and trucks, and requesting the removal, collection, and recovery of existing mercury in the vehicles already on the road.

With these goals in mind, the Clean Car Campaign kicked off its national "Switch-the-Switch" campaign on November 13, 2001. In coordination with auto dealerships, city and state agencies and environmental organizations across the country, the Switch-the-Switch events replaced convenience lighting mercury switches in vehicles currently on the road with mercury-free alternatives. This is a simple, drop-in exchange that takes about 10 minutes.

Across the country, 13 events took place. Some participating dealerships replaced

mercury switches in vehicles currently on their lots, while others offered the replacement service, free of charge, to their customers. The participating municipal and state agencies replaced mercury switches in their fleets of vehicles.

At the Saturn dealership in Silver Spring, Maryland, Gary Mendelson, service manager for the dealership, decided to offer the replacement service to anyone who brought his or her vehicle to the dealership. "Saturn cars never used mercury switches, but offering this service to everyone just seems like the right thing to do," says Mr. Mendelson.

It's only the beginning

These events and others across the country demonstrate that a replacement system for mercury switches in vehicles already on the road can work. However, to effectively address the nation's mercury problem and protect human health, the participation of auto manufacturers is essential. Whether

through legislation or manufacturer responsibility programs, it's time for U.S. automakers to "switch-the-switch." Automakers must take responsibility for the design choices they have made and for the health threat their vehicles pose. A national program is needed to collect and properly manage the 150 tons of mercury in vehicles on the road today.

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Location	Partner	Type of Event
E. Hartford, CT	Clean Water Action	Dealer
Boston, MA	Clean Water Action	Fleet
Ann Arbor, MI	Ecology Center	Public
Silver Spring, MD	Environmental Defense	Dealer
Maine (state-wide)	National Resource Council of Maine	Dealer
St. Paul, MN	State of MN	Fleet
Buffalo & Kenmore, NY	Great Lakes United	Fleet
Portland, OR	OR Environmental Council	Fleet
Providence, RI	Clean Water Action	Dealer
Carrollton, TX	City of Carrollton	Fleet
Waterbury, VT	National Wildlife Federation	Fleet
Vancouver, WA	City of Vancouver	Fleet
Superior, WI	Municipal Water Treatment Authority	Dealer