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ARA Signs National Volunteer Mercury Switch Removal Program

FAIRFAX, Virginia, The Automotive Recyclers Association (ARA) is pleased to announce that it is a partner in a national program that will help cut mercury air emissions by up to 75 tons over the next 15 years. The National Vehicle Mercury Switch Recovery Program was unveiled today at a ceremony held at ARA Gold Seal member Bionic Auto Parts and Sales, Inc., an automobile recycling facility in Chicago, Ill. The program is designed to remove mercury convenience light switches from scrap vehicles before the vehicles are flattened, shredded, and melted to make new steel.

"President Bush understands that removing these little switches will lead to big mercury reductions," said Administrator Stephen L. Johnson who was present at the ceremony. "This collaboration strengthens the United States' position as the worldwide leader in reducing mercury pollution." To commemorate the event, Johnson, assisted by Bionic Auto Parts President, John Catalano, ceremoniously pulled a mercury switch from a 1984 American Eagle provided and prepped by Bionic for this event.

Although the U.S. automobile industry halted use of mercury convenience light switches in 2002, an estimated 67 million switches are currently in use in older vehicles and available for recovery. Each year, the steel industry recycles more than 14 million tons of steel from scrap vehicles, the equivalent to nearly 13.5 million new automobiles, making vehicles the most recycled consumer product and the steel industry one of the largest consumers of recycled materials in the world.

Together with existing state mercury switch recovery efforts, this program will significantly reduce mercury air emissions from the furnaces used in steel making -- the fourth leading source in the United States after coal-fired utility boilers, industrial boilers and gold mining. Under the program, automobile dismantlers will remove the mercury convenience light switches from scrap vehicles prior to the vehicles being flattened and then shredded at scrap recycling facilities. The program will also provide a financial incentive for those who remove mercury switches.

"That automakers have agreed, in effect, to indemnify the automotive recycling facilities that participate under the National Vehicle Mercury Switch Recovery Program is significant and a key component to the program," said George Eliades, ARA Executive Vice President.

Recent efforts to cut mercury emissions have targeted industrial boilers, chlorine production facilities and a Bush Administration regulation that, for the first time, will achieve a 70 percent reduction in mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants, when fully implemented. EPA now has standards in place limiting mercury air releases from most major known industrial sources in the United States.

“ARA has been one of the integral partners from the very beginning and is proud to be a partner in this significant contribution to environmental improvement,” according to Eliades. “This program will now encourage hundreds more to remove and collect mercury switches to save and protect our land and water resources.”

The National Vehicle Mercury Switch Recovery Program is the result of a two-year collaborative effort involving the Automotive Recyclers Association, EPA, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, the American Iron and Steel Institute, the Steel Manufacturers Association, the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Environmental Defense, the Ecology Center (Ann Arbor), and representatives of the Environmental Council of the States.

Founded in 1943, the Automotive Recyclers Association has represented an industry dedicated to the efficient removal and reuse of automotive parts, and the proper disposal of inoperable motor vehicles and their hazardous fluids. With programs such as the Certified Auto Recycler program (CAR), and other partnerships with automotive manufacturers, automotive recycling will continue to provide consumers with quality, low cost alternatives for vehicle replacement parts, while preserving our environment and natural resources for tomorrow.

More information about the National Vehicle Mercury Switch Recovery Program and additional mercury reduction efforts can be accessed at the ARA Web site: <http://www.a-r-a.org>, or call 703.385.1001.



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