

'Spotlight On' – Safety Mosaic, Fall 2008
Featuring - The Ontario Automotive Recyclers Association

Protecting the environment, one auto part at a time

Ever wondered what causes the lights to go on instantly every time you raise your car's hood or trunk? Well, it's a tiny, innocuous switch generally found at the base of the light socket.

What makes this switch particularly hazardous to the environment is the fact that it contains up to one gram of mercury – small enough to ignore but potent enough to contaminate a 20 acre lake. At an average of two switches per vehicle all it takes is 304,000 vehicles to contaminate a drinking water source as large as Lake Ontario. With over 600,000 vehicles retired from Ontario's roads every year, the potential for harm to our environment is very real – but modern progressive auto recyclers exist to ensure vehicles are retired responsibly.

Auto recyclers play an important role in ensuring that vehicles are retired in a manner that ensures hazardous materials, such as mercury switches, fuel, batteries, tires, antifreeze, and oil, do not find their way to our landfills.

Speaking for Ontario's auto recyclers

The Ontario Automotive Recyclers Association (OARA) has been representing the auto recycling industry in Ontario since 1992. Together with its members it has played a pivotal role in protecting the environment by ensuring that older polluting vehicles are removed from the road and properly retired. The parts they sell help other vehicles return to the road in a safe and cost-effective manner.

Its Car Heaven program, a voluntary initiative with the Clean Air Foundation, encourages owners of older vehicles to donate their clunker to the Clean Air Foundation or to one of 14 Ontario charities in return for a cash voucher or tax receipt, a free tow and the vehicle is processed by an OARA member. The program has been so successful in Ontario since its inception in 2001 that it's now a national project with the Federal government pledging \$92 million in support over three years starting in 2009.

Partnering with OSSA

Given the nature of their work auto recyclers are faced with many workplace health and safety issues. With this in mind, OARA formed a partnership with the Ontario Service Safety Alliance (OSSA) to help members become healthier and safer.

This partnership has made the OARA Board of Directors a lot more aware of initiatives and opportunities related to health and safety. OARA Executive Director, Steve Fletcher explains “We have resurrected our Health and Safety Committee to help disseminate the information we receive on emerging issues from OSSA. We know more about the regulatory environment and have begun the process of developing educational resources for various modes of communication”

“The most visible impact of the partnership has been the development of a health and safety resource binder that is specific to our industry and offered to members at a sizeable discount” adds Fletcher.

OSSA has also co-branded a series of safe work guidelines for auto recyclers that covers specific hazards like removing miscellaneous parts, working with batteries and removing and storing fuel tanks to name a few “Many small and medium-sized businesses can feel overwhelmed with managing health & safety programs” says Lisa Sticca, Chair of OARA’s Health & Safety Committee. “OSSA resources are easy to use and help to get these programs off the ground. We are now striving for an accreditation program for our members where health and safety will be an important part in becoming a certified auto recycler.”

Elizabeth Mills, President & CEO, and John Aird, Manager of Strategic Partnerships and Special Projects, OSSA, briefed members on the prevention efforts of the Ministry of Labour and Workplace Safety & Insurance Board at the recent OARA annual conference.

“It’s wonderful to see that health and safety is now a regular subject in OARA’s newsletter” says Aird. “OSSA will continue to provide OARA with intelligence and technical support to help members reduce injuries. Member feedback will help us develop more effective products for an industry that is playing such an important role in protecting the environment”.

To know more about purchasing the binders, please call OSSA’s client services line at 1-800-478-OSSA