

Balancing Wheels and the Environment
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EPA is teaming up with auto manufacturers, distributors, retailers, recyclers, and consumers to put the brakes on the use of lead wheel weights in tires. EPA's new National Lead-Free Wheel Weight Initiative (NLFWWI) is working to reduce the amount of hazardous lead in the manufacture, use, and sale of wheel weights.

The Hazards of Lead Wheel Weights

Many Americans don't realize that the wheel weights used to balance their tires may contain hazardous materials that can be released into the environment. For years, tire weights have commonly been made of lead. These weights aren't dangerous when they're on the tire, but when a car hits a pothole or stops suddenly, lead weights can shake loose and end up on roads and in streams and lakes. Furthermore, lead wheel weights that fall off of cars are sometimes picked up by children, exposing them to lead. Lead is also attractive to some hobbyists due to its low melting point; projects involving lead can expose everyone in a home to lead fumes. A significant amount of lead enters the environment in this way. Every year, an estimated 50 million pounds of lead are used to manufacture lead wheel weights in the United States.

Lead is one of the 31 priority chemicals EPA is working to reduce in the environment. Eliminating the use of lead in wheel weights and replacing them with steel weights takes millions of tons of lead out of the waste stream, preventing its release into the environment.

Lead-Free Wheel Weights and the National Lead-Free Wheel Weight Initiative

EPA is encouraging auto manufacturers, distributors, retailers, recyclers, and consumers to make the switch to lead-free wheel weights, which are widely available and affordable. Announced last month at the Detroit Belle Isle Grand Prix, the NLFWWI has agreements with 40 partners, who have committed to phasing in the use of lead-free alternative wheel weights and reducing the amount of lead released into the environment by 2011.

The NLFWWI carries responsibilities and benefits. NLFWWI partners must agree to phase-in the use of lead-free alternative wheel weights by 2011. Partners are responsible for providing information, education, and outreach to the public regarding the use of lead-free wheel weights, and for properly collecting and recycling them. In return, partners benefit by being able to market products that contribute to a healthier environment.

State governments are also doing their part to encourage the switch to lead-free wheel weights. The Environmental Council of States (ECOS) passed a resolution in April 2008 fully supporting the initiative, and several states have committed to including requirements for lead-free weights into the purchase requirements for new vehicles and

replacement tires. The federal government is leading the change by using its purchasing power to require lead-free wheel weights for many federal fleets. Citizens can also do their part by requesting lead-free weights each time they have their tires balanced or replaced.

For more information, a list of partners, and how to join, please visit the NLFWWI Web site at: <http://www.epa.gov/osw/hazard/wastemin/nlfwwi.htm>

NLFWWI Charter Members:

Wheel Weight Manufacturers:

Perfect Equipment, Inc.
Hennessy Industries, Inc – BADA Division
Plombco
3M

Automobile Manufacturers:

Ford Motor Company
General Motors Corporation
Chrysler, LLC
Association of International Automobile Manufacturers (AIAM)
Mitsubishi Motors of North America, Inc.
American Suzuki Motor Corporation
Toyota Motor North America
American Honda Motor Company
Aston Martin Lagonda of North America
Ferrari North America
Hyundai Motor America
Isuzu Motors America
Kia Motors America
Maserati North America
Nissan North America
Subaru of America

Retailers:

Costco Wholesale
Walmart
Walmart Tire and Lube Express
Sam's Club
Walmart Tire and Battery Centers
Walmart Transportation

Tire Manufacturers:

Bridgestone Firestone BFS Retail and Commercial Operations, LLC
The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company
Bridgestone Firestone Motor Sports Car Racing Division

State Partners:

Environmental Council of States

Non-Governmental Organizations:

Ecology Center

Sierra Club

Federal Partners:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

DoD Air Force

United States Postal Service

General Services Administration

Small Businesses:

Town of Blacksburg, Virginia

South Main Auto Services in Blacksburg, Virginia

M&M Tire and Auto in Blacksburg, Virginia

Parker Station in Washington, D.C.