

Mercury Recovery Program Hits Milestone

By [Stacy Shelton](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 03/01/08

The nation's top environmental regulator was in town Friday to pull the 1 millionth — or so — mercury switch out of a junked car at an auto parts dealer in south DeKalb.

"This really is a landmark achievement, and it's worth celebrating," said U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen L. Johnson. He was joined by Georgia's U.S. senators, Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson, at Pull-A-Part, an Atlanta-based, do-it-yourself, used auto parts dealer.

EPA and various industry groups, including auto manufacturers, steel makers and scrap recyclers, started the National Vehicle Switch Recovery Program in August 2006 to prevent toxic mercury emissions when cars are crushed and recycled. Mercury was used in some cars made before 2003 in hood and trunk lights and anti-lock breaking systems.

Nationally, the recovery rate of mercury switches in junked cars is about 20 percent, said Rich Bell, president of End of Life Vehicle Solutions Corp., a nonprofit created by 13 automakers that facilitates the recovery program.

The program is voluntary. In Georgia, about 70 of the state's 200 junkyards and scrap dealers participate, said Steven L. Levetan, Pull-A-Part's senior vice president. Dealers are paid \$1 per switch from a \$4 million fund financed by the steel and auto industries.

Levetan unsuccessfully lobbied for state legislation in 2005 that would have paid dealers \$3 a switch. Automakers opposed it. "Incentive payment is crucial to the program," he said. "We'd like to see more participation."