

# Mercury milestone

## Recovery of vehicle mercury switches reaches million mark

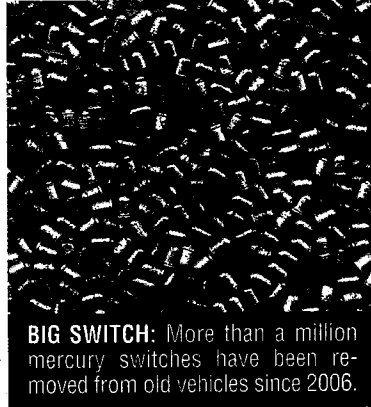
**Jim Johnson**

More than 1 million mercury switches — containing more than a ton of the toxic metal — have been removed from old, junked vehicles through a nationwide program.

The National Vehicle Mercury Switch Recovery Program recently passed the milestone and aims to collect millions more in the years ahead.

The program started in 2006 after the automobile and steel-making industries put up money to pay auto recyclers \$1 for each switch they removed before vehicles were crushed, shredded and melted down for recycling.

“By pulling mercury switches before they enter the recycling system, we are improving the health of our environment and the health of generations of U.S. residents,” said Stephen Johnson,



**BIG SWITCH:** More than a million mercury switches have been removed from old vehicles since 2006.

administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The End of Life Vehicle Solutions Corp., or ELVS, was established to oversee the program and hired the Environmental Quality Co. to provide collection services for recyclers.

Mercury switches were commonly used prior to 2003 to con-

trol both hood and trunk lights. A switch contains mercury, which moves when a trunk or hood is opened to create an electrical connection that turns on the lights.

While the switches only contain a small amount of mercury, only a small amount of mercury is needed to cause environmental problems.

By removing and recycling the switches, recyclers avoid the possibility of mercury contamination at their sites when cars are crushed and shredded.

The program is expected to operate for years as older vehicles continue to find their way to the end of their useful lives. The goal is to capture 80 to 90 percent of all mercury switches from pre-2003 vehicles by 2017. ■

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