

REMARKS BY SUSAN BODINE
NATIONAL LEAD-FREE WHEEL WEIGHT INITIATIVE
DETROIT, MICHIGAN
AUGUST 29, 2008

It gives me great pleasure to join with all of you today to announce that, within the next three years, the use of lead as a wheel weight will virtually come to an end in this country. This is great news for the environment, great news for water quality, and great news for everyone, because exposure to lead will be greatly reduced, especially for children, who face the greatest health risks from lead. And the credit for this exceptional environmental achievement goes to a long list of people -- the manufacturers of tires, tire weights, and automobiles; distributors; retailers; tire service shops; federal and state government agencies; and environmentalists.

They've all made a public commitment to phase out the use of lead as a wheel weight, and to educate the public about the benefits of non-lead weights. Speaking for everyone who cares about public health and environmental quality, I want to thank all our partners in the National Lead-Free Wheel Weight Initiative for this commitment to environmental stewardship.

For the last several years EPA has been working in partnership with businesses, other government agencies, non-profit organizations, and communities across the country to sharply reduce the production and use of the most toxic, persistent, and bioaccumulating chemicals. These efforts

have produced from very promising results. So far, our partnerships have eliminated the use of over 14 million pounds of those chemicals.

Lead is one of them. And the partnership that we're announcing today is committed to cutting the production and use of the 50 million pounds of lead that go into tire weights each year. We have targeted this particular use of lead for good reason. Wheel weights sometimes fall off tires when vehicles hit potholes, curbs, or other vehicles. Those weights end up being carried by the rain through storm drains and into our lakes and rivers. From there, the lead can enter the food chain, which results in serious health effects, including effects on brain development in children.

And that's not the only risk posed by lead wheel weights. Workers who make lead wheel weights or who service tires can be exposed to lead. Changing from lead to a safer material eliminates this risk, and reduces the cost of protecting workers.

Hobbyists are another population at risk from exposure to lead. Kids sometimes find lead wheel weights and melt them at home to make miniature racers or soldiers, exposing themselves to hazardous lead fumes. Fishermen use lead to make weights for their fishing lines. And a week ago the Wall Street Journal ran a story about the practice of "yo-yoing," when fishermen fill bait fish with lead so they sink to the bottom where they be eaten by other, more valuable fish. It's not clear how many hobbyists use lead, or where they get their lead, but tire service shops tell us that people ask for used lead all the time. That practice has to stop. The risks to human health and environmental quality are simply too high.

Affordable and effective lead-free weights are now available in the market. It's time to start promoting these alternatives for use in the United States. They work just as well as lead, as you can see today by watching the Bridgestone-Firestone Indy Car racers. All the Indy cars here today are using lead-free tire weights, as you will be in the next few years. And there is no loss of performance.

The broad, national partnership that has committed to eliminating the use of lead as a wheel weight is remarkable for a number of reasons. For one thing, it's voluntary. These companies and government agencies have signed on because they know it's the right thing to do for the environment, and because safer alternatives are available. They're putting their expertise and their reputations behind this project, which bodes well for our success. Second, our partners include virtually every element of the business world related to wheel weights. Automobile companies, wheel weight manufacturers, and distributors and retailers of replacement tires, and auto service shops – they've all signed on. Third, this initiative is not only about phasing out lead wheel weights. It's about educating consumers, and changing consumer preferences. We believe that when consumers understand the benefits of safer alternatives, they'll tell their mechanic: "No lead tire weights for me!" And fourth, our partners are going to eliminate lead as a wheel weight in a very short time. By the end of 2011, we expect the use of lead to be virtually ended. Given the scope of the problem, that's lightning speed.

Let me tell you about our partnership team. It's distinguished list. It includes these automobile companies, domestic and foreign, who have designed lead-free weights into all their new cars:

- Ford
- General Motors
- Chrysler
- 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
- The Association of International Automobile
Manufacturers

Our partners include these wheel weight manufacturers who found innovative alternatives to lead:

- Perfect Equipment, Inc
- Hennessy Industries, Inc
- 3M Automotive Division
- Plombco

And they include these retailers and tire manufacturers who will use non-lead weights in replacement tires and when servicing tires.

- Bridgestone / Firestone
- Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company
- Costco
- Wal-Mart
- Sam's Club
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And finally, our partners include people who just care about the environment, and who know this is one way to help protect it.

- The Ecology Center
- The Sierra Club
- The town of Blacksburg, Virginia

Finally, I'd like to mention the government agencies that are behind this initiative. State environmental agencies support our efforts, and several states have already committed to establish purchasing requirements for lead-free weights for their own fleets.

The federal government also is supporting this change by using its purchasing power to require lead-free wheel weights for many federal fleet vehicles, including the Postal Service and, of course the cars that EPA uses. I'm delighted to have the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Air Force and representatives from the General Services Administration here to show that we are moving toward lead-free weights in our federal purchases, too.

Representatives of many of our partners are in the room today, and I invite the reporters here to talk to them about their actions to eliminate lead tire weights. Finally, I want to thank all of the members of the press for coming today. And I want to ask for your help in spreading word of this initiative. We want the public to ask for lead-free weights whenever they replace their tires. That demand will be the single most powerful force for change.

Thank you.