

Auto Recyclers

Technical Assistance Campaign: Executive Summary

October 2003



Thurston County Environmental Health Division recognizes the auto recycling industry plays an important role in the automobile industry. Without the ability to safely manage our auto waste, we would all be negatively impacted. For this we owe our local auto recyclers thanks. However, more often we hear about this industry with regard to environmental impacts.

Therefore, in 2002, Thurston County Environmental Health conducted a voluntary technical assistance campaign for the auto recycling industry. All twelve active, licensed auto recyclers in Thurston County participated in the campaign and received site visits. The focus for the site visits was to help local auto recyclers understand and comply with Thurston County's Nonpoint Source Pollution Ordinance, present some best management practices, and provide a regulatory contact for the industry. Thurston County's Nonpoint Source Pollution Ordinance requires businesses to provide secondary containment for all hazardous liquids and to dispose or recycle hazardous materials in a legal manner (verified by disposal receipts and manifests).

Thurston County developed the campaign approach with the help of the Washington State Department of Ecology, Hazardous Waste and Toxic Reduction Program. Seven hazardous materials were identified that must be removed during the processing of a vehicle for recycling. These seven wastes are: gas, oil, antifreeze, batteries, Freon, lead tire weights, and the residual liquid from crushing events. Once removed from the vehicle, these items become hazardous wastes and can be reused, recycled, or disposed of according to dangerous waste regulations. Thurston County then developed a list of options available for each of these hazardous wastes with the emphasis on reuse and recycling.

Thurston County Environmental Health also presented 31 best management practices (non-regulatory) to the auto recyclers to further help minimize the impacts of their work on the environment. These management practices covered the areas of: spill containment and cleanup, site maintenance, storage, solvent use, hazardous material management, and recyclable and solid wastes. At the time of the initial site visits the individual facilities were already conducting an average of 21 of these 31 best management practices.

The single most significant management practice is the complete removal of hazardous materials from each vehicle as soon as it comes in. During the vehicle-processing stage, the workers should at a minimum drain the crank case oil, transmission, gas tank, radiator, and brake lines and remove any Freon, the battery, and the tires and their weights. In addition we recommend the removal of mercury switches, undeployed air bags, battery clamps, and oil filters.

Because each facility can accumulate a great deal of hazardous materials during the processing stage of operations, they need to have adequate secondary containment available. At a minimum, each facility should have secondary containment for six 55-gallon drums (two for oil, two for antifreeze, two for gas) and should call for disposal when one barrel of any waste stream is full. Secondary containment units work best if they are covered and every employee understands how the waste streams are separated.

Thurston County Environmental Health also requires that auto recyclers obtain documentation from their auto-crushing vendor stating how much hazardous liquid was generated during each crush event. If an auto recycler does not remove all hazardous liquids before they have a vendor crush the vehicles, then the crush operator will remove most of the gasoline prior to crushing. This practice will result in the facility generating two waste streams, gas and mixed waste liquid. The gasoline may or may not be a waste, but the combined waste liquid will designate as a hazardous waste. If the facility generates more than half of a 55-gallon drum of hazardous waste during the crush event then they are not a Small Quantity Generator of hazardous waste and need to report annually to the Washington State Department of Ecology.

At the time of the initial site visits, four of the twelve auto recyclers were operating in compliance with the County ordinance. After an initial site visit and at least one follow-up visit, nine of the twelve facilities achieved compliance. Notices of Violation were issued to the three remaining facilities after a second follow-up inspection. Thurston County Environmental Health continued to work with these three businesses to help them gain compliance and to set up a record-keeping system to maintain compliance.

After the campaign ended in May 2003, all but one auto recycler was operating in compliance with Thurston County's Nonpoint Source Pollution Ordinance. The facility that did not gain compliance was not open for business at the end of the campaign, and was determined to have Medium Quantity Generator status. Thurston County performed a joint inspection at this business with the Department of Ecology, which continues to work with this business.

For more information about the auto recycler campaign, please contact Patrick Soderberg at 360-754-4111 ext. 7273.