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Product Stewardship Institute, Inc. Launches Program Aimed at Reducing Mercury Pollution in Great Lakes

Through U.S. EPA grant, Institute will work with thermostat and automotive industries to reduce releases of mercury from products

BOSTON, Mass.—The [Product Stewardship Institute, Inc.](http://www.productstewardship.com) (PSI), a national nonprofit dedicated to reducing the health and environmental impacts of consumer products, today announced that it has launched a program to reduce mercury levels in the Great Lakes Basin by promoting the safer disposal of thermostats and auto switches, two major sources of mercury pollution.

Through a \$197,022 grant funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), PSI will work with state and local government agencies, industry representatives, and other stakeholders to develop and implement strategies to encourage the proper disposal of mercury-containing products. Such strategies will include the introduction of new methods of education and outreach for over 5,000 heating and cooling professionals in the State of Illinois, and for the operators of nearly 400 auto dismantling facilities. PSI will also spearhead a financial incentive pilot program to encourage proper disposal of mercury-containing products. The results of this pilot program will provide valuable insight on the impact of financial incentives on program performance.

“With PSI’s strong record of developing policies to safely manage mercury from consumer products, we are optimistic that their expertise will help us bolster our restoration and protection of the largest surface freshwater system in the nation,” says Becky Jane, an environmental protection specialist at the Illinois EPA. “We look forward to working with PSI on this important project.”

The grant is part of the pollution prevention component of the EPA’s [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes), the largest investment in the Great Lakes in two decades, and will enable PSI to reduce mercury disposal in the Great Lakes basin by an estimated 190 pounds. However, the benefits of this project will not be limited to the Great Lakes, notes Scott Cassel, PSI’s founder and chief executive officer: “The data



collected from our work on this project will facilitate the development of strong and effective product stewardship programs for auto switches and thermostats nationwide.”

Mercury is a highly toxic element that, throughout much of U.S. history, has been used in many industrial and household applications. Exposure to mercury poses great risks to human health, leading to neurological, cardiac, and immune disorders, and can even cause developmental problems in unborn babies.

Despite its inherent health risks, manufacturers have long used mercury in many products because of the element’s excellent electrical conductivity and other unique properties. According to the Illinois EPA, until 2003, many automobile manufacturers used mercury in the switches that power lights on hoods, trunks, and vanity mirrors. Many older household thermostats that are still in use today contain this dangerous element, as well. When these products enter the waste stream, the mercury they contain can leak into the environment, seeping into soil and waterways and contaminating our food supply.

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About the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI)

The Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to reducing the health and environmental impacts of consumer products. PSI brings together key stakeholders with conflicting interests to develop product end-of-life solutions in a collaborative manner, with a focus on having manufacturers assume primary financial and managerial responsibility. With a robust membership base of 47 state governments and over 200 local governments, as well as partnerships with more than 75 companies, organizations, universities, and non-U.S. governments, PSI advances both voluntary programs and legislation to promote industry-led product stewardship initiatives. For more information, visit PSI online at www.productstewardship.us. You can also follow PSI on Twitter at twitter.com/ProductSteward and on Facebook at facebook.com/ProductStewardship.