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In Wake of High-Profile Study on Air Pollution in Cars, Volvo, Hyundai Move Toward Elimination of Dangerous Chemicals

International Attention for Ecology Center's Report on Toxic Chemicals in Cars Serves as Wake-Up Call for Car Manufacturers and Consumers

Mercedes, Chrysler, Toyota and Subaru Urged to Reduce Highest Levels of Toxic Chemicals Used to Make Interior Auto Parts

(*Detroit, MI*) – Since the January 11 release of the Ecology Center's first-of-its-kind study about toxic chemical exposure in automobile interiors, car manufacturers have been under pressure to prove that their cars are safe for drivers and passengers alike.

The study – *Toxic at Any Speed: Chemicals in Cars & the Need for Safe Alternatives* – looked at two groups of chemicals that have been linked to birth defects, impaired learning, liver toxicity, premature births and early puberty in laboratory animals, among other serious health problems. The chemicals in question -- PBDEs, used as flame retardants, and phthalates, used to soften PVC plastics (and partly responsible for "new car smell") -- are used to make seat cushions, armrests, floor coverings, wire insulation and other interior auto parts. Dozens of news stories are continuing to come out about the new report on such stations as ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox and Telemundo, putting car manufacturers and consumers on alert.

Car companies have stepped forward to provide additional information on their use of high-performing and less toxic alternatives to the chemicals highlighted in the report. **Volvo**, which was found to have the lowest levels of phthalates and the second lowest levels of PBDEs (**see full chart below for details**), issued a press release stating that: "Volvo has been working for many years on creating a clean interior climate which is also suitable for people who are particularly sensitive, such as those suffering from asthma and allergies." A **Hyundai** representative has indicated that the company has never used PBDEs. This is confirmed by the test results cited in the report, however, Hyundai did have the highest level of phthalates of any company. **Ford** reports that it has eliminated PBDEs from "interior components that customers may come into contact with," and had among the lowest level of PBDEs in their vehicles. **General Motors** and **BMW** vehicles also had lower than average levels for all chemicals tested. **Mercedes, Chrysler, Toyota** and **Subaru** had higher than average levels of both PBDEs and phthalates.

"We applaud these companies who are moving toward creating cleaner, safer environments for drivers and passengers," said Jeff Gearhart, the Ecology center's Clean Car Campaign Director who co-authored the report. "They prove the feasibility of implementing safe alternatives."

The Ecology Center collected windshield film and dust samples from 2000 to 2005 model cars made by 11 leading auto manufacturers. Other manufacturers tested include Honda and Volkswagen. **The full report, can be found at www.ecocenter.org.**

Television, print and radio stories about *Toxic at Any Speed* have appeared around the country and in the UK and Canada with headlines such as: “The inside of your car could be bad for your health,” “Ever worry about what you’re inhaling sitting in traffic?” and “Your car could be making you sick.” As a result, consumers are paying attention.

The study found that concentrations of PBDEs in dust and windshield film samples were up to five times higher than those found in homes and offices in previous studies. Since the average American spends more than 1.5 hours in their car every day breathing in these chemicals, the inside of a car is a significant source of indoor air pollution. According to the EPA, indoor air pollution is currently one of the top five environmental risks to public health.

The study also found that these chemicals are more rapidly released into the air in extreme temperatures. Since automobiles have 360-degree windows surrounding the interior, cars can heat up to 190°F. In addition, UV exposure from parking in the sun creates a favorable environment for chemical breakdown, causing PBDE flame retardants to decompose into even more dangerous compounds. Solar exposure in cars can be 5 times higher than in homes or offices, according to the study.

Both PBDEs and phthalates are considered chemicals of concern due to their toxicity and ubiquity in the environment. Levels of PBDEs found in the breast milk of American women and some fetuses are approaching levels shown to impair learning and cause behavioral problems in lab mice. These chemicals have also been linked to thyroid hormone disruption and liver toxicity in animals. One type of phthalate found in a large variety of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) products, called DEHP, has been linked to premature birth, reproductive defects and early onset puberty in lab animals.

The new report makes the following recommendations:

- **For Manufacturers:** Manufacturers should reduce the health risk to vehicle occupants by phasing out PBDEs and phthalates in auto interior parts, setting specific timelines for its material and component suppliers. The Ecology Center is particularly calling on those manufacturers who have not made efforts to improve their chemical policies, such as Mercedes, Chrysler, Toyota and Subaru.
- **For Government:** Congress and individual states should encourage rapid action to phase-out the use of PBDEs and phthalates by requiring phase-out timelines. Government purchasers should further require disclosure on the use of these substances in their purchasing specifications. In lieu of legislative action at the federal level, at least 9 U.S. states (California, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Oregon and Washington) have passed laws banning the two worst forms of PBDEs, namely penta and octa. Additional legislation is being considered in at least 6 other states, as well as revisions of existing legislation to extend PBDE phase-outs to all uses of deca, a third form of PBDE.
- **For Vehicle Occupants:** Car owners can take some direct actions to minimize health risks from PBDEs and phthalates in car interiors. Some of these actions will also reduce the risks associated with other interior car pollutants. Drivers can reduce the rate of exposure, release and break-down of these chemicals by vacuuming often, using solar reflectors, ventilating car interiors, and parking away from sunlight whenever possible.

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