

20. AUTOS: Manufacturers failing to use non-toxic, recyclable materials -- report (02/24/2005)

Alex Kaplun, *Greenwire* reporter

Major U.S. automakers do little to build cars with non-toxic, recyclable plastics, according to a report released yesterday by a Michigan-based advocacy group.

The Ecology Center [report](#) ranked Toyota Motor Corp. as the industry leader in the use of sustainable plastics, although it still received only an average overall score from the group.

Honda Motor Co. came in second, followed by DaimlerChrysler AG, Ford Motor Co. and Nissan Motor Co. General Motors Corp. came in last among the big six, barely receiving a passing grade.

GM spokeswoman Joanne Krell said the report inaccurately represented her company's standing because the group used information compiled from corporate responsibility reports, in which companies have wide latitude on what information they provide.

"Maybe we're not doing as much data reporting as another company," Krell said. "From our perspective that's a good sign of how integrated [recyclability] is to our work already. For an outside organization to say we're going to choose one way to look at what all the companies are doing ... we don't think that's comparing apples to apples."

Grades were based on three factors: the company's vision for sustainable plastics, the goals it has set to achieve the use of such materials and its progress toward those goals. The group defined sustainable plastics as materials that have no hazardous chemicals associated with their lifecycle, are capable of being recycled and are manufactured from renewable raw materials.

Plastics make up about 7.5 percent of an average vehicle's weight, the report says. All told, the six major automakers produce about 4.3 billion pounds of plastics a year in the United States alone, with much of it ending up in landfills or incinerators.

The report blasted all the automakers for relying heavily on fossil-fuel-based and toxic chemicals -- such the polyvinyl chloride. The report also says five of the six automakers -- with Toyota the only exception -- have shown "weak" commitment to using more sustainable plastics.

Charles Griffith, a report author, admitted that while the use of recyclable plastics is generally "not on the radar screen of the auto companies," he anticipated that Toyota's leadership on the issue would force others to follow. "Toyota has gotten out front on this, and we think that will create competitive pressure that will force the industry to pay attention," Griffith said.

Griffith said part of the reason that foreign automakers generally lead their U.S. counterparts in the use of recyclable materials is because environmental laws regulating the use of such chemicals are stricter in Europe and Japan.