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Greenville County students announce legislation introduced to ban lead and mercury wheel weights in South Carolina

Legislation aims to improve water quality in state

Greenville, South Carolina, April 11, 2016 – Ten students from the Sterling School in Greenville have introduced a bill to ban the sale and use of lead and mercury wheel balance weights in South Carolina. If the bill passes, South Carolina would be the eighth state in the nation to ban lead wheel weights. Maryland is currently considering a similar measure.

The bill, H. 5141, was introduced by The Hyperbolics, a *FIRST*® LEGO® League robotics team of fourth, fifth and sixth grade students. The students aim to improve water quality and safety in the state by reducing the number of lead and mercury wheel weights that fall from cars onto South Carolina roadways and wash into storm drains, rivers, and lakes.

“No amount of lead is safe for humans,” said team member and fourth grader Emma Turgeon. “There is no reason to use wheel weights made of lead or mercury when steel, zinc, and other choices are available at comparable costs and the same ease of use.”

Wheel weights are used to balance wheels so they will spin smoothly at high rates of speed. Most wheel weights are about the size of a finger and are clipped to the wheel rim, although adhesive styles are also available. When tires hit potholes, curbs, or experience other wear and tear, the wheel weights can fall off.

“South Carolina drivers know that wheels get out of balance easily because of the poor condition of our roads,” said teammate and fifth grader Lily Brown. “If the wheel weights lost from cars are made of lead, they can wear down in as little as two weeks and wash into our storm drains and waterways.”

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Wheel weights were traditionally made of lead because of its density and malleability, but now that the dangers of lead are understood and other materials are widely available, car manufacturers and national tire dealers and service centers now use safer steel, zinc or composites.

The bill would phase out wheel weights containing lead or mercury, prohibiting their use in service or tire replacement by January 1, 2018 and in the sale of new vehicles by January 1, 2019.

“We support H. 5141 and believe it will have a positive effect on the automotive maintenance and service industry in South Carolina,” said Jason Dennis, owner of the Tire Exchange, a locally-owned automotive service center in Mauldin. “The cost of non-lead wheel weights is virtually the same and it makes no difference to our mechanics whether they use lead or non-lead. We believe that a ban on lead wheel weights will further boost production of non-lead weights and further lower their costs and accessibility.”

The legislation is the result of work by *FIRST*® LEGO® League (FLL) team #1670, the Hyperbolics, who researched the topic as a part of this year’s international FLL challenge, “Trash Trek.” The team learned that non amount of lead is safe for humans, but that because of the use of lead wheel weights on South Carolina vehicles, thousands of pounds of lead in powdered form are likely entering the state’s waterways each year. They presented a proposal to the Greenville County Legislative Delegation to introduce a ban.

H. 5141 is sponsored by Representatives Bruce Bannister, Mike Burns, Chandra Dillard, Phyllis Henderson, and Leola Robinson-Simpson and has been assigned to the House Committee on Labor, Commerce and Industry chaired by Rep. Bill Sandifer. The students expect a companion bill to be introduced in the SC Senate.

The students are optimistic that their elected officials will support the measure. “South Carolina has some of the best water in the country, and we want to keep it that way,” said fifth grader Matthew Smith. “This started as a team project for *FIRST*® LEGO® League, but it’s become so much more. We have the chance to help small business and protect the health of South Carolinians for years to come.”

Learn more about the bill and Team Hypberbolics at www.saynotolead.com or www.teamhyperbolics.com
