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Local News

Business brief

Auto recycling ultimate environmental choice

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Mention auto recycling and most people still conjure up the old 'junkyard dog' image.

"Nothing could be further than the truth," says Wally Dingman of Caughill Auto Wreckers.

Caughill Auto is a member of the Ontario Automotive Recyclers Association (OARA), a group of industry members spreading that message through the rebranding of recycled auto parts under the moniker of Green Parts.

"It really is a more accurate name for what we offer here," said Dingman.

"Cars are seen as this horrible enemy of the environment, but when they're handled properly, they're about the greenest consumer products out there."

More than 80 per cent of a vehicle by weight is reused, re-manufactured or recycled in some way.

Tanks, batteries and tires are removed and are recycled, reused or disposed of appropriately. Parts are carefully removed, cleaned and tested for resale. Each part is tagged, coded and computerized before it is properly stored.

The unusable portion of the vehicle is then crushed and shredded, and then the salvaged ferrous and non-ferrous metals are separated and reused to make new cars and other products. And the cycle starts again.

"The real problems happen when a car isn't handled properly," warns Dingman.

"There are good operators and bad ones in this business. The bad ones just strip off the most profitable parts, and then send the rest for crushing. They don't bother removing the batteries, the oil, fluids, refrigerants or mercury switches. The soil and groundwater gets contaminated and all that toxic stuff just makes its way into the lakes and rivers and air. It's an environmental nightmare."

Only about 10 per cent of all end-of-life vehicles end up with responsible operators, he says.

Licensing could clean up the industry. A major part of the Green Parts initiative is the development of a code of environmental practice that they would like to see become law.

"Most people are surprised that auto recycling in Ontario is pretty much unregulated. There are some municipal bylaws in place, but for the most there are no overall standards. If you've got a tow truck and a cell phone and can pay cash for cars, no one is really stopping you from that," says Steve Fletcher, the association's Executive Director.

"There is a lot of investment in facilities and extra labour required to handle cars in an environmentally responsible way. Our members do that voluntarily. But our position is that it should be required of every operator in the province. There's too much at stake to leave it to chance."

So is the Green Parts program resulting in more sales for Caughill Auto Wreckers?

"That's hard to pinpoint. We're definitely busier than a year ago, but that could be due to the economy. Green parts are a great way to save money. We do know that there are consumers out there that consciously make environmentally friendly choices," says Dingman. Regardless of the economic benefits, he says he wouldn't do business any other way.

"It's just the right thing to do."

That, he said, makes the extra cost and effort worthwhile.