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Ford, Gage Nix Paint Solvent Waste

By Byron Pope
Staff Reporter

Ford Motor Co. and supplier partner Gage Products Co. recently celebrated an environmental initiative the two companies began 20 years ago.

The process developed by Ford and Gage is a paint-solvent recovery program, which

GAGE PRODUCTS CEO Donald Dixon, left, hands the 50-millionth gallon of recycled paint solvent to Ford's Andrew Acho and James L. Richardson, right.

to date, has resulted in 50 million gallons of remanufactured solvent that would have otherwise ended up in landfills.

Ford and Gage officials recently met at the automaker's Rouge manufacturing complex in Dearborn where a ceremonial 50-millionth gallon was hand delivered by Gage President and CEO Donald R. Dixon. The event also marked the start-up of Ford F-Series production at the Rouge.

The process was first introduced by Dixon and James L. Richardson, Heritage Project

Manager, Vehicle Operations, Ford, at Ford's Wixom plant in 1984. Rather than a "cradle-to-grave" solution, the recovery program is a "cradle-to-cradle" solution, Ford says.

During the painting process, automated paint sprayers often have to switch colors.

During the changeover, solvent is used to clean the sprayers before a new color is introduced. Prior to the paint-solvent recovery program, the solvent was sent to a landfill.

The innovative recycling process, however, allows Gage

to return the solvent to its original state, officials said.

Ford then uses it again and the residual fuel from the process is used to create concrete, which results in no waste, they said.

The recycling process is currently used in 19 Ford assembly plants in the U.S. and Canada.

"What we found is that when you get engineers together working on sustainable solutions, [they] are found by people that are really in the middle of the manufacturing process," Richardson said.

