Automotive Oils

Sustainability Insights

Product Description

Automotive oils are used for reducing friction between mechanical parts to increase efficiency and reduce component wear, and include petroleum-based lubricating oils used in automobiles, such as motor oil, transmission fluid, power steering fluid, transfer case fluid, and differential fluid.

Mission

The mission of The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) is to improve the sustainability of products when they are made, purchased, and used, with a focus on manufacturers and the retail buyers who decide what products to carry in stores. The information in this document is drawn from our detailed research on known and potential social and environmental impacts across product life cycles. TSC acknowledges that other issues exist, but we have included here those that are most relevant to the decision making of retail buying teams and manufacturers. The topics are listed alphabetically for ease of reading; the order does not represent prioritization or other criteria.

Sustainability Insights

Managing the Supply Chain

Fossil Resources

Production of automotive oils requires extracting significant amounts of crude oil, which is a limited natural resource. In addition, the extraction and refining of crude oil can result in negative environmental impacts. Manufacturers should maximize the use of recycled oil to offset the need for new oil production.

Use of Resources

Climate and Energy

Burning fuels during refining operations causes the emission of pollutants that contribute to climate change, smog, acid rain, and other impacts. Manufacturers should procure their oil from refineries that implement best practices and technology to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions.

Disposal and End-of-Life

Used oil contains harmful chemicals that, if leaked, spilled, or disposed of improperly, can pose a health threat to humans and other life. Manufacturers should participate in programs that collect and handle oil responsibly after final use, and educate consumers about proper disposal.

Packaging

Packaging design should be optimized to ensure that packaging performs its essential functions of containment and protection while minimizing use of materials, energy resources, and environmental impacts across the life cycle of the packaged product. Under-packaging and over-packaging can both lead to increased impacts. These impacts may be mitigated by using more energy-efficient manufacturing, creating packaging materials from renewable resources, designing packaging to be recyclable, and encouraging consumer recycling.

Pollution

Refining processes and storage tanks at oil refineries can both emit toxic gases. Polluted wastewater can also be generated by the oil refining process. Manufacturers should procure oil from refineries that implement best available practices and technology to abate the release of air and water pollutants.

Workers and Communities

Community Rights

Oil refining facilities can generate significant noise, which may be disruptive to surrounding communities. Manufacturers should procure oil from refineries that implement best available practices and technology to abate noise.

Workers

Workers at refineries that supply automotive oil ingredients may be exposed to harmful chemicals and other industrial hazards. To help ensure worker health and safety, manufacturers should implement codes of conduct for their suppliers and audit their supply chains for safe working conditions.