32. A method for preparing a functionalized polymer, the method comprising the steps of:

(i) polymerizing conjugated diene monomer, and optionally monomer copolymerizable therewith, to form a polymer having a reactive chain end; and

(ii) reacting the reactive chain end of the polymer with a ~~protected~~ lactone or thiolactone that contains a protected amino group.

33. The method of claim 32, where said step of polymerizing employs a coordination catalyst or an anionic initiator.

34. The method of claim 32, further comprising the step of protonating the polymer after said step of reacting.

35. A functionalized polymer prepared by the steps of:

(i) polymerizing conjugated diene monomer, and optionally monomer copolymerizable therewith, to form a polymer having a reactive chain end; and

(ii) reacting the reactive chain end of the polymer with a lactone or thiolactone that contains a protected amino group.

36. A tire component prepared by employing the functionalized polymer of claim 35.

37. A vulcanizable composition comprising:

the functionalized polymer of claim 35, a filler, and a curative.

38. A functionalized polymer defined by the formula: