

# MERCURY

## The Slippery, Silent Toxin to Dispose of Carefully

You may be surprised to find mercury in your home, business and places you go often. When spilled or not disposed of carefully, it poses a risk to human and ecosystem health.



### Why is Mercury Such a Problem?

Mercury, or quicksilver, is an element that serves many useful purposes – when contained. It conducts electricity, is used in thermometers, thermostats, barometers, blood pressure cuffs and many other everyday items such as some alarm clocks and irons. The most common use is in today's fluorescent light bulbs that use mercury vapor.

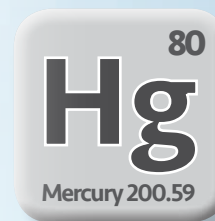
The trouble comes when mercury is not disposed of properly or worse, when it spills. Mercury is a toxic element that can enter the body through an open wound or by inhaling or ingesting it. It can cause damage to nerves, the liver and kidneys, as well as a number of other symptoms.

If mercury is poured down the drain or dumped into the sewer, it seeps into lakes and waterways, a chemical process occurs, converting it to deadly methylmercury, potentially contaminating the fish and animals we eat.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Mercury is the only metal that is liquid at room temperature.



**Read the reverse  
for safe ways to  
dispose of mercury.**



## When products containing mercury are placed in the trash or poured down the drain, the mercury does not disappear. It ends up in the environment via landfills and wastewater treatment facilities.

Now that you know some of the items that contain mercury, you can make buying decisions that reduce the amount of mercury in your home or office, and that assure safe disposal of products that contain mercury.

One helpful hint is to mark items that contain mercury with a sticker or other helpful reminder for you when it comes time to dispose of that item. Instead of placing it into the trash, find the right resource to dispose of it.

### Find a scrap dealer or retailer that will handle safe disposal.

Many scrap dealers today have ways to safely dispose of mercury and will take these items off your hands. This can include those items identified on the front of this handout and these:

- Blue-tint auto headlights
- Pilot light sensors from gas appliances, gauges, switches and relays from chest freezers
- Pre-1972 washing machines, sump pumps, electric space heaters
- Clothes irons with tilt shut-offs
- Liquid metal in children's home science kits
- Athletic shoes with flashing lights in the soles manufactured pre-1997
- Batteries – mercuric acid and some alkaline varieties

The Internet is a good way to search for items containing mercury. If the scrap dealer does not have a way to safely dispose of mercury, search online for a mercury recycling plant.

### Here's how to recycle items that contain mercury:

When mercury vapor bulbs burn out, carefully remove them from the fixture and store in their original container or sturdy box. Mark the box "Mercury for Recycling." Call the store where you bought the item and ask if they will recycle it for you. Also, many large DIY home stores recycle light bulbs. If these aren't viable options, you can contact your county solid waste facility for guidance on proper disposal. One last idea is to search the Internet for best mercury recycling options near you.

### Thank you for doing your part in keeping our environment and community healthy.

\*This handout is not a full and complete guide to the safe handling and disposal of mercury. Please consult your local county extension and the Internet for more thorough and specific information as needed.

Never touch or vacuum up spilled mercury in any form, including broken light bulbs. With liquid mercury, air out the room immediately. Use an eye-dropper to pull the mercury off the surface and duct tape to capture the rest. Should a mercury-vapor light bulb break, air out the room immediately and scoop the pieces into a sealable, plastic container and mark it "Mercury for Recycling."

