UK COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY — COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Mercury in Homes

Mercury can be found in many common household items. Thermometers, thermostats, fluorescent lamps, and appliance switches are just a few. Mercury and its compounds are toxic. But, most household items with mercury are harmless unless broken. Not disposing of them properly can also be dangerous.

As you replace items that contain mercury, look for mercury free alternatives. Always dispose of items that contain mercury properly. You should not put them in your regular household trash. Contact your trash company or local officials to find out how you can dispose of items that contain mercury. Handle them with care, and secure them in a tightly sealed bag.

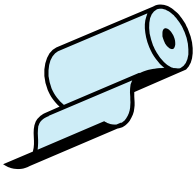
If you have a mercury spill in your home, keep your family safe. Take people and pets away from the spill. If you spill a small amount of mercury, like the amount in a thermometer, follow the steps below for clean-up. If you spill more than the amount in a thermometer, call local authorities for assistance. Vacuuming will put the mercury into the air, so do not use a vacuum to clean up a spill. Sweeping breaks the beads apart and scatters them, so do not sweep mercury.

Cleaning Up Small Spills:

1. Clear the area of people and pets.
2. Turn off your air conditioner or heating system.
3. Put on rubber gloves.

4. Pick up any broken pieces.
5. Place the broken pieces on a damp paper towel and seal in a zipper seal bag.
6. Use 2 stiff pieces of paper to gather mercury beads.
7. Collect the beads with an eyedropper.

8. Place beads on a damp paper towel.



9. Seal the paper towel in a zipper seal bag.
10. Place paper towels, paper, eyedropper, and gloves in a zipper seal bag.
11. Call your local authorities to find out how to dispose of these items.

12. If mercury spilled on carpet or fabric, dispose of it as well.

References:
Brachman, Steve, et.al. “Mercury in Schools and the Community: A National Issue”, University of Wisconsin-Extension, March 2002.
Atiles, Jorge. “Mercury: Sources and Dangers of Mercury in the Home”, The University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences Cooperative Extension Service.

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