

Mercury in Thermometers



Link: RI Dept of Health:

<http://www.health.state.ri.us/healthyhousing/mercury/thermometers.php>

Guidance for Managing Broken Mercury Fever Thermometers

Mercury is a naturally occurring element that is toxic to people and wildlife. When products containing mercury are broken or thrown in the trash, outdoors or down the drain, the mercury can pollute our environment and contaminate many kinds of fish. You and your family can be exposed to mercury by breathing its fumes, eating contaminated fish or touching spilled mercury.

Mercury is found in a number of household products, including fever thermometers. A standard mercury fever thermometer contains about $\frac{1}{2}$ gram of mercury. While this small amount of mercury does not ordinarily pose an immediate risk to the health of children, proper clean up procedures need to be implemented to ensure that the mercury does not vaporize. Mercury vapors pose a more serious threat to children's health.

Replace Mercury Thermometers

Replace your mercury fever thermometers with non-mercury alternatives. There are digital thermometers and one time temperature strips.

A mercury thermometer can be easily identified by the presence of a silver bulb. (One exception to this is the new fever thermometers containing gallium, indium and tin that also contain a silver bulb but are clearly marked mercury-free.) If the bulb is red, blue, purple, green or any other color, it is not a mercury thermometer.

When a Thermometer Breaks

- If a thermometer breaks, try to contain the spill. **Never vacuum mercury.** It can vaporize the mercury and increase the chances of human exposure.
- Keep children, pets and others away from the area of the spill.
- Ventilate the room where the spill occurred.
- Wear neoprene gloves when cleaning up the spill.
- Use a piece of cardboard to push the beads together and prevent the mercury from spreading.
- Try to divert the mercury from cracks and crevices.
- Use scotch tape, masking tape or duct tape to pick up small beads of mercury.
- Use a flashlight to detect any remaining beads of mercury.
- Sprinkle sulfur powder on the spill area after cleaning up beads of mercury; a color change from yellow to brown indicates that mercury is still present.
- Push the mercury into an envelope and put the envelope, scotch tape, gloves and the broken thermometer into a sealable plastic bag. Store the mercury in a secure place, preferably away from occupied areas and dispose of at a mercury household collection site. Contact the RIRRC Eco Depot: 401- 942-1430
<http://www.rirrc.org/content/index.php?id=resident/how-do-i-dispose-of-/eco-depot/>