

Fact Sheet 9

MERCURY



A program of Des Moines County Regional Solid Waste Commission and Great River Regional Waste Authority.

Mercury is a toxic metal that can cause severe damage to major organs and the central nervous system, and cause permanent harm to unborn children. The form of mercury most commonly found in homes is elemental mercury, a heavy, odorless, silver-colored liquid. Elemental mercury is found in thermometers, thermostats, and switches in appliances (such as chest freezers and very old clothes washers).



MANAGEMENT OF MERCURY-CONTAINING DEVICES

- Purchase and use alcohol or digital thermometers whenever possible.
- Install electronic thermostats instead of those with a mercury switch.

DISPOSAL OF MERCURY-CONTAINING DEVICES

- Thermometers and mercury-containing thermostats - Bring to the HazChem Center (see directions on other side).
- Mercury switches in appliances - Bring the entire appliance to Area Recyclers, 1818 West Burlington Ave, Burlington. The mercury switch will be removed and properly disposed of before the appliance is recycled. Appliance drop-off hours are Monday-Saturday, 7:30-11:30 a.m., or by appointment.



HOW TO HANDLE A MERCURY SPILL

If a thermometer or other mercury-containing device breaks, take the following steps.

DO:

- Close the room off and increase ventilation with outside air.
- Pick up the mercury with an eyedropper or scoop up beads with a piece of heavy paper (playing cards, index cards, etc.). Duct tape can also be used to pick up any glass particles and mercury beads.
- Triple-bag the mercury, contaminated instruments (eyedropper, heavy paper) and broken glass inside plastic zipper bags, sealing each bag with tape. Place inside a wide-mouth, sealable plastic container. Bring to HazChem Center (see other side for directions).
- Throw away everything that touched the mercury, including towels, bedding and clothes.
- If possible, leave windows open for two days to completely ventilate the area.
- Wash hands very well with soap and water. Shower well if you think mercury touched other parts of your body.

DONT:

- Sweep the area with a broom. The mercury will break up and spread around the room.
- Use an ordinary household vacuum cleaner. The mercury will vaporize and spread through the air.
- Pour mercury down the drain. It may stay in the plumbing.
- Wash mercury-contaminated clothing in a washing machine. It can contaminate the machine.
- Walk around if your shoes or socks may be contaminated with mercury. That will spread mercury droplets all over the house.
- Use household cleaning products to clean the spill. They can react with the mercury to release a toxic gas.