

Mercury and the Environment

Mercury is highly toxic and found in everyday household items.

Mercury is a natural occurring chemical element that is liquid at room temperature. It can be found in many household items including:

- Thermometers (with silver colored liquid)
- Thermostats (non - electric)
- Fluorescent light bulbs and mercury-vapor lamps
- Gauges (barometers and older blood pressure meters)
- Clothes Irons (automatic or tilt shut - offs)
- Batteries (mercuric oxide, some alkaline)
- Paint (latex before 1990)
- Switches (electric space heaters, sump pump, chest freezers)
- Pilot light sensors found in gas appliances such as stoves, furnaces, and waters heaters.

Mercury is a concern because it is toxic. Exposure to mercury can affect the central nervous system in humans. Even a very small amount of spilled mercury can cause widespread contamination. For example, the amount of mercury in one thermometer can contaminate a 60-acre lake.

Preventing Mercury Pollution

Most mercury in the environment comes from the improper disposal of products that contain mercury and from coal burning power plants.

Preventing mercury pollution is essential, and everyone can help.

You can:

- Learn about products that contain mercury and look for non-mercury containing alternatives.
- Make an inventory of mercury containing products in your home.
- Properly dispose of or recycle mercury containing products.
- Try to reduce your reliance on coal burning energy sources by conserving electricity when possible.

Help prevent mercury contamination by choosing mercury-free products when available. Use a digital thermometer, a programmable thermostat, low mercury fluorescent bulbs, and L.E.D. lighting fixtures.