



# Search for Mercury in Your Home

You may be surprised at how many things in your home may contain mercury. Mercury is released into the environment when these products are mishandled or disposed of improperly. Review the following list of items to find out if you have products containing mercury. If it is unclear whether something you have contains mercury or not, call the manufacturer. If you own products containing mercury, find safer alternatives.

Remember, according to the Minnesota Waste Management Act, products containing mercury must be disposed of properly (not the garbage, drain, or toilet). Take them to your county household hazardous waste collection facility (contact your county solid waste officer for location and hours). For more information on disposal, contact the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance at 1-800-657-3843.

**Thermometers** - Minnesota State Law (SF 70, HF 274) prohibits the sale or distribution of mercury thermometers. Purchase a digital or red-alcohol thermometer instead.



## Did You Know?

In 2000, the mercury from fever thermometers accounted for 17 tons, or 10%, of the mercury found in the municipal solid waste stream.

*US EPA Background Information on Mercury Sources and Regulations (Table 6)-  
[http://www.epa.gov/grtlakes/bnsdocs/mercsrce/merc\\_srce.html](http://www.epa.gov/grtlakes/bnsdocs/mercsrce/merc_srce.html)*

**Thermostats and Appliance Switches** - Mercury is used in temperature-sensitive or mechanical (tilt) switches in many appliances. Examples of appliances that have mercury switches include thermostats, some clothing irons with automatic shut-off switches, and some top loading freezers and washing machines.

**Lights** - Fluorescent lights use up to 50 percent less electricity than incandescent lights, thus saving energy and reducing emissions from power plants. However, fluorescent, high intensity discharge (HID) and neon lights contain a vapor form of mercury. If bulbs are broken or incinerated mercury is released. In Minnesota all fluorescent lamps must be recycled at the end of their useful lives by taking them to your county household hazardous waste collection facility (contact your county solid waste officer for location and hours). Alternative "low mercury" lights are available and can be recognized by their green end caps.

**Batteries** - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Battery Act has phased out the use of mercury in most batteries. Yet, old alkaline and small, button shaped batteries used in things like watches and hearing aids can still contain mercury. Often toys with little flashing lights contain tiny batteries with mercury.

## Did You Know?

Mercury from batteries accounted for 98 tons, or 57%, of mercury found in the municipal solid waste stream prior to 1990.

*US EPA Background Information on Mercury Sources and Regulations (Table 6)-  
[http://www.epa.gov/grtlakes/bnsdocs/mercsrce/merc\\_srce.html](http://www.epa.gov/grtlakes/bnsdocs/mercsrce/merc_srce.html)*



**Paints** - Latex paint produced before 1992 had large amounts of mercury to prevent fungus growth. Mercury vapors were released when paint was applied. Use latex paint manufactured after 1992.

**Old Chemistry Sets and Toys** - Children's chemistry sets were once sold with liquid mercury. Another type of old toy, the mercury maze, contained a drop of mercury that was moved through a maze. Even new toys sometimes contain mercury.

**Athletic Shoes** - Some athletic shoes (made by LA Gear up until 1994) with flashing lights in the soles contain mercury. Some states have banned the sale of these shoes. Newer shoes are mercury-free.

**Pesticides and Fertilizers** – Some fungicides and biocides produced before 1994 used mercury to kill fungus, weeds and other pests. New pesticides are mercury-free. Fertilizers are still not regulated for heavy metal content. Use compost and manure instead.

*(A new EPA rule has formally authorized the practice of recycling hazardous waste [including toxic heavy metals like lead, arsenic, mercury, and cadmium] into zinc-based fertilizers for commercial and residential use. The fertilizers do not have to be labeled. A lawsuit has been filed against the EPA. Learn more at [www.chechnet.org/healthhouse/education/articles-detail.asp?Main\\_ID=173](http://www.chechnet.org/healthhouse/education/articles-detail.asp?Main_ID=173).)*



**Blood Pressure Gauges** - Home blood pressure gauges contain almost 1.5 pounds of mercury. An aneroid blood-pressure unit is a mercury-free option.

**Barometers** - A barometer is an instrument used to measure pressure in the atmosphere that contains liquid mercury. A Bourdon tube gauge is an alternative to mercury-containing barometers.

*Information provided by: Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, [www.epa.state.oh.us](http://www.epa.state.oh.us), <http://www.mercuryinschools.uwex.edu/community/>, and [www.chechnet.org](http://www.chechnet.org).*

### **Additional Resources**

**[www.mercuryinschools.uwex.edu/community/](http://www.mercuryinschools.uwex.edu/community/)** - The University of Wisconsin Extension's Solid and Hazardous Waste Education Center's mercury in schools education and outreach program. Find information on mercury sources, health advisories and reduction programs as well as information and activities on health issues, cultural uses, mercury in schools, mercury at home, mercury in the community, environmental impacts, the history of mercury use, a Mercury I.Q. Test, Mercury in the Food Chain, Mercury in the Atmosphere and Mercury through the Ages.

**[www.moea.state.mn.us/berc/mercury-resources.cfm](http://www.moea.state.mn.us/berc/mercury-resources.cfm)** - The Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance's mercury resources list.

**[www.chechnet.org/healthhouse/education/articles-detail.asp?Main\\_ID=139](http://www.chechnet.org/healthhouse/education/articles-detail.asp?Main_ID=139)** - The Children's Health Environmental Coalition's article on mercury in electronics.

**[www.moea.state.mn.us/publications/hhw-mercuryspills.pdf](http://www.moea.state.mn.us/publications/hhw-mercuryspills.pdf)** - "Cleaning up spilled mercury in the home"

**[www.noharm.org/mercury/issue](http://www.noharm.org/mercury/issue)** - Health Care Without Harm's web page with information for hospitals to go mercury-free.

**[www.pca.state.mn.us/programs/mercury-free/goals.html](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/programs/mercury-free/goals.html)** - The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's web page with information to help schools go mercury-free.

**[www.mercuryexposure.org/index.php?page\\_id=29](http://www.mercuryexposure.org/index.php?page_id=29)** - Mercury Exposure is an organization working to prevent and reduce mercury exposure in the areas of dentistry, medicine, living environment and the biosphere, in a humanitarian effort to preserve quality of life.