

MERCURY USE: CONTRACTORS & CONSTRUCTION

Contractors (HVAC, electrical, service equipment, paint, etc) are in a position to come into contact with a number of different pieces of equipment or products that potentially contain mercury. This puts contractors in a unique position to help communities identify and possibly collect these mercury-bearing products from our homes and businesses.

Table of Contents

Keeping Mercury-Containing Items Out of Wastewater 221

About This Handout 222

Why Should I Be Concerned About Mercury? 223

Mercury Product Focus: Batteries 225

Mercury Product Focus: Gauges: Manometers, Barometers, and Vacuum Gauges 227

Mercury Product Focus: Lamps 227

Mercury Product Focus: Switches 229

Mercury Product Focus: Mercury-Containing Thermostat Probes 232

Mercury Product Focus: Thermometers 232

Mercury Spills 233

Action Steps for Contractors to Consider 234

Sample Proclamation 236

Bibliography 239

Keeping Mercury-Containing Items out of Wastewater

There are a number of ways mercury can enter a wastewater stream. When a mercury-containing product such as a thermometer is broken over a sink or improperly cleaned up after a spill, the mercury could get flushed down the drain. Mercury may also be present in a facility’s sewer pipes and traps from historical use of mercury.

Once mercury enters a wastewater treatment plant, most of it concentrates in wastewater biosolids during treatment. Since most treatment plants dispose of generated solids by land spreading, mercury enters the terrestrial environment by this process. Some of this mercury spread on land

may, over time, be volatilized to the atmosphere. This mercury may then be deposited into lakes and streams, methylated, and ingested by fish, eventually reaching wildlife and humans.

To prevent such occurrences, it is important to have effective spill response measures. Instruments containing mercury should be labeled and proper procedures should be followed when cleaning or refilling instruments that contain mercury. Instrument cleaning or refilling should take place in a well ventilated area, and, if possible, over a tray to contain any spills.

Contractors come into contact with a variety of products that may contain mercury:

- ✓ Batteries
- ✓ Gauges
- ✓ Lamps
- ✓ Switches, Relays, and Sensors
- ✓ Manometers
- ✓ Thermometers
- ✓ Flame Sensors
- ✓ Thermo-Electric Devices

ABOUT THIS HANDOUT

This is one chapter of the “Wisconsin Mercury SourceBook.” The Sourcebook was written as a guide for communities to help identify and reduce the purposeful use of mercury. The SourceBook contains background information on mercury contamination and provides a seven-step outline for drafting a mercury reduction plan.

This handout is one of the nineteen sectors that were highlighted in the SourceBook as a potential contributor of mercury in any given community.

What you will find in this handout:

- ★ Information on mercury-containing products and that are unique to contractors or the construction industry
- ★ Information on mercury-containing products that are found both in this sector and in a wide variety of other sectors (e.g., fluorescent lamps, switches)
- ★ Case studies that describe the source substitution experiences of contractors or businesses in the construction industry
- ★ Action ideas that describe pollution prevention, recycling, and management practices for a mercury reduction plan for a contractor or business in the construction industry. This provides a good overview of the types of mercury-containing products and alternatives that may exist for contractors or the construction industry
- ★ A sample proclamation that explains the mercury issue and possible mercury minimization options for contractors or the construction industry
- ★ Current mercury projects in this sector

The USEPA funded a brochure that was written by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources called “Mercury in the Environment.” This handout has special information about mercury-containing lamps, switches and relays, thermostats, gauges, barometers, and vacuum gauges, thermometers, and thermostat probes. Much of the information outlined above came from this pamphlet. This handout could be widely distributed to contractors throughout Wisconsin.

For more information, please contact:

WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT MERCURY?

Some of you may remember playing with mercury when you were a child. Its silvery white shimmer was entrancing, and the ability of its glistening mass to split and come back together again was magical. But scientists are now beginning to realize that there is another side to mercury's wily nature. In fact, it is some of mercury's most elemental qualities that make it a difficult substance to handle.

Mercury is a common element that is found naturally in a free state or mixed in ores. It also may be present in rocks or released during volcanic activity. However, most of the mercury that enters the environment in Wisconsin comes from human uses.

Because mercury is very dense, expands and contracts evenly with temperature changes, and has high electrical conductivity, it has been used in thousands of industrial, agricultural, medical, and household applications.

It is estimated that half of the anthropogenic mercury releases in Wisconsin are the result of the purposeful use of mercury. The other half of mercury emissions originate from energy production.

Major uses of mercury include dental amalgams, tilt switches, thermometers, lamps, pigments, batteries, reagents, and barometers. When these products are thrown in the trash or flushed down a drain, the mercury doesn't go away.

The good news is that the majority of products that use mercury purposefully have acceptable alternatives. For example, electric vacuum gages, expansion or aneroid monitors are good alternatives to mercury blood pressure monitors. Mechanical switches, magnetic dry reed switches, and optic sensors can replace mercury tilt switches.

Replacing mercury-laden products with less toxic alternatives is referred to as *source reduction*. Source reduction allows us to

eliminate the use of mercury in certain waste streams. This is especially beneficial considering the volatile nature of mercury, because mercury can so easily transfer from air to soil to water.

Practicing source reduction in combination with recycling the mercury already in the waste stream can have a significant impact on reducing mercury levels in the environment.

HEALTH EFFECTS OF ELEMENTAL MERCURY

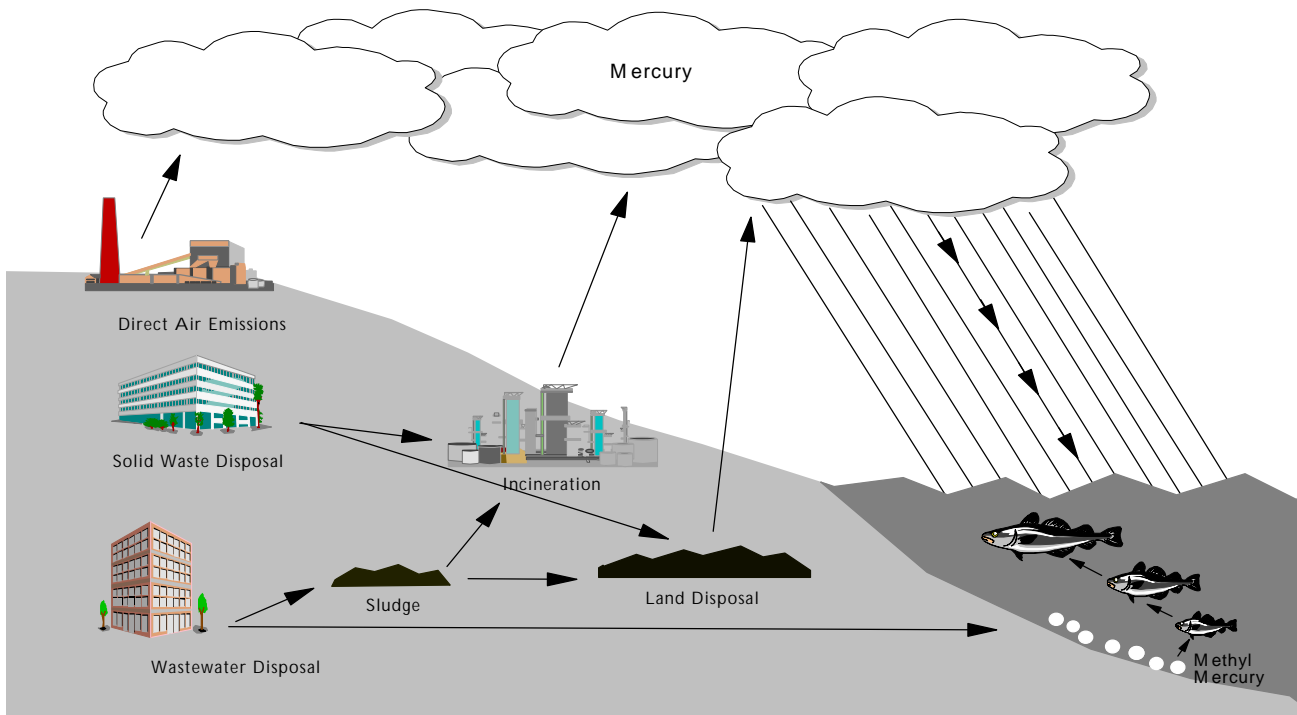
The toxicity of mercury has long been known to humans. Hat makers during the 19th century developed symptoms of shaking and slurring of speech from exposure to large amounts of inorganic mercury, which was used to give a metallic sheen to felt hats. This gave rise to the term "mad as a hatter."

The hat makers were suffering from neurological damage from the inhalation of mercury fumes. Exposure to elemental mercury vapors can cause acute respiratory problems, which are followed by neurologic disturbances and general systemic effects. Acute exposure to inorganic mercury by ingestion may also cause gastrointestinal disturbances and may effect the kidneys.

SO WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Mercury is a bioaccumulative, persistent, toxic substance that threatens the health of humans and wildlife throughout North America. The USEPA, Environment Canada, the International Joint Commission, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation and many state and provincial governments have identified mercury as one of the most critical pollutants for significant elimination and/or reduction.

Mercury Transport and Bioaccumulation



Mercury can enter the environment from a number of paths. For example, if a mercury-containing item is thrown into the garbage, the mercury may be released into the atmosphere from landfill vapors or leachate, or the mercury may vaporize if the trash is incinerated. If mercury is flushed through a wastewater system, the mercury will likely adhere to the wastewater sludge, where it has the potential to volatilize and be deposited elsewhere. Mercury can enter the atmosphere through these various means because it evaporates easily. It then travels through the atmosphere in a vaporized state.

Once mercury is deposited into lakes and streams, bacteria convert some of the mercury into an organic form called *methylmercury*. This is the form of mercury that humans and other animals ingest when they eat some types of fish. Methylmercury is particularly dangerous because it *bioaccumulates* in the environment. Bioaccumulation occurs when the methylmercury in fish tissue concentrates as larger fish eat smaller fish. A 22-inch Northern Pike weighing two pounds can have a mercury concentration as much as 225,000 times as high as the surrounding water.

These concentrations are significant when one considers the potential toxic effects of methylmercury. Methylmercury interferes with the nervous system of the human body and can result in a decreased ability to walk, talk, see, and hear. In extreme examples, high levels of methylmercury consumption has resulted in coma or death.

Many animals that eat fish also accumulate methylmercury. Mink, otters, and loons in Wisconsin have been found to have high levels of mercury in their tissue. Mercury can interfere with an animal's ability to reproduce, and lead to weight loss, or early death.

Fish Consumption Advisories

There are currently 260 lakes and more than 350 miles of rivers in Wisconsin that have fish consumption advisories because of mercury.

Approximately 1 out every 3 sites that is tested is listed on the advisory; no sites have ever been removed. Forty-eight states now issue fish consumption advisories to protect human health. Most of these warnings are related to mercury contamination.

Mercury Product Focus: Batteries

✓ Mercuric Oxide Batteries

Prior to the 1980s, most primary batteries and some storage batteries contained mercury in the form of mercuric oxide (HgO), zinc amalgam (Zn-Hg), mercuric chloride (HgCl₂), or mercurous chloride (Hg₂Cl₂). Although the amount of mercury used in each of these batteries was very small, the number of batteries sold in the US was enough to make alkaline batteries the largest component of mercury in the solid waste stream in 1989.

Great pollution prevention progress has been made in this field. In the last decade, the US battery industry has achieved a 99 percent reduction in their use of mercury! The use of alternative materials and different manufacturing techniques have eliminated the use of mercury in almost all battery applications.

Mercury does exist in mercury zinc, carbon zinc, silver oxide, and zinc air batteries. The amount of mercury discarded in mercury zinc batteries is expected to decline in the future as the use of silver oxide and zinc air batteries increases. The use of mercury in zinc air and silver oxide batteries is expected to be discontinued.

Today, mercuric oxide batteries are the only batteries that use mercury to any measurable

degree. There are two basic types of mercuric oxide batteries: button cell and larger sizes. The button cell batteries are the types that are most often sold for personal use; they are used in hearing aids, watches, and other items requiring a small battery.

Mercuric oxide batteries offer a reliable and constant rate of discharge. Therefore, the larger mercuric oxide batteries (which look like 9-volt or fat AA batteries) are often used in military, hospital, or industrial uses. The mercury content in these mercury oxide batteries total 33 to 50 percent mercury by weight of the battery.

1993 Wisconsin Act 74

The 1993 Wisconsin Act 74 prohibits the sale in Wisconsin of any alkaline manganese battery manufactured after January 1, 1996, unless the manufacturer can prove that the alkaline manganese battery contains no intentionally introduced mercury. Alkaline manganese button cells can only be sold if they contain no more than 25 mg of mercury.

Zinc Carbon batteries manufactured after July 1, 1994 for sale in Wisconsin must contain no intentionally introduced mercury. Beginning July 1, 1994 mercuric oxide batteries, except button cells, may not be sold in Wisconsin unless the manufacturer identifies a collection site that meets prescribed standards, informs each purchaser of the collection site and a telephone number to call for information on recycling batteries, and informs the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection and DNR of this collection site. The law also states that only a certified collection site may treat, store, or dispose of mercuric oxide batteries, and they must be recycled if possible.

Batteries and Mercury Content

From "Household Batteries Waste Management Study," by Gershman, Brickner, and Bratton, Inc., 1992; "Managing Used Dry-Cell Batteries: A Household Hazardous Waste Fact Sheet," MPCA

Type of Battery	Example of Use	Mercury Content
Alkaline		
Cylindrical or rectangular cells; the most commonly recognized battery. Labeled "alkaline."	Flashlight, radios, toys, calculators, remote controls, electronic games, portable radios and televisions, garage door openers.	Previously contained an average of 0.5 percent mercury to control the zinc reaction. 1993 Wisconsin Act 74 mandates that all alkaline manganese batteries sold in Wisconsin after January 1, 1996 be mercury free. Alkaline manganese button cell batteries to contain no more than 25 milligrams of mercury .
Zinc Carbon		
Cylindrical or rectangular cells; labeled as "General Purpose", "Heavy Duty", or "Classic"	Best used in slow drain applications like clocks, garage door openers, pagers, and smoke detectors. Have much shorter life span than Alkaline batteries.	Use of mercury in these batteries is being phased out. 1993 Wisconsin Act 74 mandates that all zinc carbon batteries for sale after July 1, 1994 be mercury free.
Silver Oxide		
Button shaped with no distinguishing marks	Watches, calculators, toys, greeting cards, musical books	Contain about one percent mercury by weight. Mercury use in these batteries is expected to be discontinued.
Zinc Air		
Usually button shaped. Identify by pin hole on one side	Hearing aids	Contain about one percent mercury by weight. Mercury use in these batteries is expected to be discontinued.
Mercury Zinc (Mercuric Oxide)		
Button shaped, marked with + ; larger mercuric oxide batteries look like 9-volt or fat AA batteries	Hearing aids, watches, and other items requiring a small battery. In consumer applications, mercuric oxide batteries are being replaced by zinc-air button cells. The larger mercuric oxide batteries are often used in military, hospital, or industrial uses.	Contain significant amounts of mercury ; total 33 to 50 percent by weight of the battery. Wisconsin Act 74, requires a collection system for those selling mercuric oxide batteries, and requires the recycling of mercuric oxide batteries unless no reasonable alternative exists.

Mercury Product Focus: Gauges: Manometers, Barometers, and Vacuum Gauges

(from blue waste connection pamphlet)

Contractors may encounter liquid mercury in the gauges found in manometers or vacuum gauges. The mercury in these gauges responds to air pressure in a precise way that can be calibrated on a scale. Mercury-free alternatives to these gauges operate on the same principle as these gauges but use mercury-free liquids in the tube.

Needle or bourdon gauges operate under a vacuum with a needle indicator. Electronic gauges can be used to measure pressure, but they must be calibrated with a mercury manometer. Equipment manufacturers recommend that service technicians use a needle or digital gauge to test the systems they are servicing, but that they calibrate the gauges they use in the field with a mercury manometer kept at their shop.

Mercury manometers occasionally need servicing to maintain their accuracy, and elemental mercury often remains as a waste. If the manometer is hard to read because of dirt and moisture in the tube, the mercury needs to be removed and replaced.

Mercury Product Focus: Lamps

- ✓ **fluorescent**
 - bilirubin blue
 - general purpose straight, U-bent, circline, compact
 - high output
- ✓ **germicidal lamps**
 - cold cathode
 - hot cathode
 - slimline
- ✓ **metal halide**
- ✓ **high pressure sodium**

There are a number of electric lamps that use mercury as an intrinsic part of their functioning. These lamps include fluorescent, mercury vapor, metal halide, and high pressure sodium lamps. These lamps may be used indoors or outdoors in heat lamps, film projection, photography, dental exams, photochemistry, water purification, or street lighting.

Fluorescent lamps contain mercury in a vapor form. The electric current of the lamp “excites” the mercury atoms, which then give off invisible ultraviolet light. The ultraviolet light then “excites” a powdery phosphorus coating inside the tube that emits visible light. The mercury that is contained in these lamps is emitted into the atmosphere when the lamps are broken, disposed of in landfills, or incinerated.

Fluorescent lamps are still a good option. They last longer and cost less to run than incandescent lights because they use up to 50 percent less electricity. This energy savings helps reduce mercury emissions because small amounts of mercury are present in coal that is burned in power plants. The less energy we use, the less mercury will be released into the environment when coal is burned.

Recycling Your Fluorescent Lamps

Several Wisconsin companies are in the business of recycling fluorescent lamps and incandescent bulbs. The copper coils, and aluminum or brass end pieces are smelted and reused as raw materials for non-food products. The glass can be purified and used to make fiberglass. The mercury is distilled from the phosphor powder and reused in new lamps and thermometers.

State hazardous waste regulations prohibit businesses from disposing of waste lamps and light bulbs in sanitary landfills if those lamps and bulbs contain levels of heavy metals that exceed hazardous waste limits. For information on the storage, collection, and transport of fluorescent lamps, please see the informational handout, "Recycling Your Fluorescent Lamps," in the "Resources" section of this sourcebook.

New Low Mercury Fluorescent Lamp

Phillips Electronics has developed a long-life fluorescent that contains so little mercury it is no longer considered a hazardous waste. "Typically fluorescent lamps have an overabundance of mercury, because mercury loses its effectiveness due to physical and chemical reactions. So manufacturers put in an overdose of mercury to compensate for these reactions," said George Preston, a scientist at Philips Lighting Co. Currently, a four-foot lamp contains about 22.8 milligrams of mercury, down from 38.4 milligrams in 1990. Philips's new lamp contains less than 10 milligrams of mercury. The new lamp, named ALTO™, relies on a "buffering mechanism" that blocks the physical and chemical reactions that cause the mercury to lose its effectiveness over time. The lamp also uses a new form of phosphorus patented by Philips.

From "Philips Unveils a Fluorescent Lamp With Less Mercury and a Long Life," Wall Street Journal, June 9, 1995

Types of Bulbs and Lamps that Contain Mercury

- ◆ **Fluorescent Lamps** - the tube-style were first used as overhead lighting in offices, now they also come in compact globe shapes for a variety of home and office uses
- ◆ **Mercury Vapor Lamps** - the first high intensity discharge (HID) lamps with blue-white light, originally used as farmyard lights
- ◆ **Metal Halide Lamps** - newer, more efficient HID lights found in homes and offices
- ◆ **High-Pressure Sodium Vapor Lamps** - white-yellow HID lights used for street lamps and outdoor security lighting
- ◆ **Neon Lamps** - brightly colored lamps typically used in advertising; most colors contain mercury except red, orange, and pink

- From the Wisconsin Recycling Markets Directory

Mercury Product Focus: Switches

- ✓ G-sensors (security system applications)
- ✓ Proximity sensors, magnetically activated
- ✓ Oscillators
- ✓ Phanatrons
- ✓ Rectifiers
- ✓ Wetted reed relay/wetted reed switch: test, calibration, measurement equipment (For specialized equipment - mass produced applications do not need)

Displacement/Plunger Relays:

Mercury to Steel or Tungsten Contact; Mercury to Mercury Contact

- ✓ high current/voltage lighting
- ✓ power supply switching
- ✓ resistance heating
- ✓ tungsten lighting
- ✓ welding

Tilt Switches

Including SPST, SPDT, NO, NC, wide angle, omnidirectional, circuit board mount

- ✓ “silent” wall switches, single pole and three way (believed to be totally discontinued in 1991)
- ✓ airflow/fan limit controls
- ✓ building security systems (tilt and trembler devices)
- ✓ chest freezer lid switches (for light)
- ✓ cameras (still, video, film: overridable position sensor to protect CCD from sunlight damage)
- ✓ fire alarm box switch
- ✓ fluid level control (mounted on float, on lever arm, on diaphragm or on plunger)
- ✓ greenhouse louver positioning devices
- ✓ laptop computer (screen shut-off when closed)
- ✓ “man down” alarms
- ✓ pneumatic tube communication systems
- ✓ portable phone (mute/privacy switch when phone is in horizontal position)
- ✓ pressure control
- ✓ safety shut off- limit switches for industrial machinery
- ✓ temperature control
- ✓ thermostats
 - room temperature control
 - refrigerators
- ✓ washing machine lids (for spin-cycle shut-off)

Another source of mercury that contractors may encounter is mercury switches. A small electrical switch may contain 3,500 milligrams of mercury; industrial switches may contain as much as eight pounds of mercury. Mercury is used in temperature-sensitive switches and in mechanical switches. The mechanical (tilt) switches are activated by a change from a vertical to a horizontal position. These are used in products like thermostats and silent switches. Mercury-containing tilt-switches may also be present in or under the lids of clothes washers and chest freezers - they stop the spin cycle or turn on a light. Mercury tilt switches are also found in motion-sensitive and position sensitive safety switches in clothes irons or space heaters. If a mechanical switch is not visible in these items, a mercury switch is probably being used.

Mercury tilt switches have been used in thermostats for more than 40 years. According to Honeywell, Inc., a major manufacturer of thermostats, more than 50 million mercury-containing thermostats have been sold since the 1950s for use in homes and offices. Mercury in these thermostats provide accurate and reliable temperature control, require little maintenance, and do not need a power source. However, each mercury switch in a thermostat contains about 3 grams of mercury. (There may be one or more of these switches in a single thermostat, each switch in a sealed glass bulb.) Alternatives to these products include electronic thermostats, which can be

programmed to set room temperatures at predetermined times. (*blue brochure: the waste connection*)

Float control switches may be used in septic tank and sump pumps to turn the equipment on and off when water is at a certain level. Often, these switches are visible. Temperature-sensitive switches may be used in thermostats. Yet another type of mercury switch, the plunger or displacement relay, is used in high current, high voltage applications that could include lighting, resistance heating, or power supply switching (*M2P2*).

Reduction Works!

Honeywell Corporation has been running a free take-back program in Minnesota to collect any brand of used mercury-containing thermostat through either a reverse distribution system or a recycle by-mail system.

Honeywell works with heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) wholesalers who sell their products. Honeywell has one license (called a network license) for all the wholesalers who are participating as a consolidation point for the thermostats. HVAC wholesalers contact their Honeywell customer service representatives to order containers for used thermostats, and Honeywell sends the wholesaler a plastic container with an attached lid that holds 100 thermostats.

Homeowners who replace their own thermostats without contractor assistance or with contractors who are not currently participating in the Honeywell program may recycle their thermostats through the free recycle-by-mail system. These individuals can call a toll-free number to receive a free postage paid thermostat mailer.

We hope to soon establish a collection system like this in Wisconsin.

Mercury Switches in Electrical Applications

(source: Michigan Mercury Pollution Prevention Task Force, 1996)

Switch	Quantity of Mercury	Available Alternatives
Tilt Switch		
· Thermostats	3,000 - 6,000 mg	Electronic type and snap switches
· Float Control (septic tank and sump pumps)	?	Magnetic dry reed switch, optic sensor, or mechanical switch
· Freezer Light	2,000 mg	Mechanical switch
· Washing Machine (power shut off)	2,000 mg	Mechanical switch
· Silent Switches (light switches prior to 1991)	2,600 mg	Mechanical switch
Thermo-Electrical Applications		
· Accustat ("mercury in glass thermostat," a calibrated device resembling a thermometer is used to provide precise temperature control for specialized applications)	~ 1,000 mg	?
· Flame Sensor (used in residential and commercial gas ranges, mercury is in capillary tube when heated mercury vaporizes and opens gas valve or operates switch. Used for both electrical or mechanical output.)	2,500 mg	Hot surface ignition system for devices or products that have electrical connections.

Mercury Product Focus: Mercury-Containing Thermostat Probes (also known as mercury thermocouples)

(from blue waste connection pamphlet)

- ✓ Some infrared heaters (Robertshaw and Harper-Wyman)
- ✓ Some furnaces (White Rodgers)

Stainless steel bulb, capillary tube, bellows/control device: Used for “unsupervised burners” in certain gas fired devices with standing pilot or electronic ignition pilot.

Mercury-containing thermostat probes may be found in several types of gas-fired appliances that have pilot lights such as ranges, ovens, clothes dryers, water heaters, furnaces, or space heaters. The metal probe consists of a metal bulb and thin tube attached to a gas-control valve. The mercury is inside the tube and expands or contract to open and shut the valve. A high percentage of gas stoves, ovens, and space heaters contain a mercury thermostat probe. Electric stoves and hot water heaters (gas, electric, and oil) may contain mercury thermostat probes. Although non-mercury thermostat probes have been used in these appliances, you should treat all

probes as though they contain mercury, unless you know that they do not.

Mercury thermostat probes, also known as flame sensors or gas safety valves, are most commonly present as part of the safety valve that prevents gas flow if the pilot light is not lit. In this application the bulb of the thermostat probe projects into or near the pilot light. These are commonly present in gas ovens and may be present in any other appliance with a pilot light.

A mercury-thermostat probe may also be present as part of the main temperature controlling gas valve. In this application, the probe is in the air or water that is being heated and is not directly in contact with any flame. These are typically found in older ovens, clothes dryers, water heaters, or space heaters.

Mercury Product Focus: Thermometers

- ✓ ASTM and laboratory
- ✓ cup case
- ✓ incubator/water bath
- ✓ Mason’s Hygrometer
- ✓ maximum registering
- ✓ minimum/maximum
- ✓ sling psychrometer
- ✓ tapered bulb
- ✓ weather

Digital or aneroid thermometers are good alternatives for most applications of mercury thermometers.

MERCURY SPILLS

As a contractor, you will probably continue to encounter mercury for some time to come. Therefore, it is essential to handle these mercury and mercury-containing items safely. Small droplets of spilled mercury may lodge in cracks and sinks, mix with dust, accumulate on work surfaces, and adhere to knit fabrics, shoe soles, watches, gold, and other jewelry. This allows for mercury to potentially be transported to other locations, homes, or businesses.

The Costs of Mercury Spills

Mercury spills can be expensive for a number of reasons. Here are some examples:

The Cost of Clean-up

- ◆ A mercury-containing sphygmomanometer broken on a carpeted floor at Butterworth Hospital cost \$2000 to clean up.

Labor costs

- ◆ It took Riverside Hospital 8 to 16 hours to clean up a mercury spill (the mercury had fallen in tile crevices).

Facility Down-Time

- ◆ The room in which a mercury spill occurs will be unavailable for use until the site is decontaminated. Riverside Hospital found that their room was out of service for at least one day.

Equipment Loss

- ◆ A mercury-containing switch in an oven in a University of Michigan Hospital cafeteria exploded. It cost \$3500 to clean up the spill. The oven, a \$25,000 piece of equipment, was irreparably damaged.

Training Time

- ◆ Continuing to use mercury containing items can be expensive for your facility because of the needed staff training for spill response plans. However, if you are still using mercury-containing products, don't neglect this important step! An improperly handled spill can end up costing even more to decontaminate.

Handle Mercury Safely!

- ✓ Use mercury only in uncarpeted, well-ventilated areas. Provide troughs on smooth surfaced tables and benches to collect mercury spills. Reserve the room for mercury use only; restrict traffic in the area.
- ✓ Ask workers to remove all watches and other jewelry - especially gold jewelry since mercury readily combines with gold - and have them wear a mercury vapor respirator and protective clothing: gloves, disposable gowns, and shoe coverings.
- ✓ Prohibit smoking, eating, and drinking in the area.
- ✓ Train all workers to understand the properties and hazards of mercury and to carry out safe handling procedures and specific policies related to mercury disposal.
- ✓ Clean and calibrate all mercury-containing equipment according to the manufacturer's recommended handling procedures and the formal procedures posed by your communications or safety program supervisors.
- ✓ Ask your safety supply vendor for a mercury vacuum sweeper and spill cleanup kit. Having the right equipment on hand will limit the amount of mercury released into the atmosphere.

- From "The Case Against Mercury: Rx for Pollution Prevention," The Terrane Institute

ACTION STEPS FOR CONTRACTORS TO CONSIDER

Product Substitution

- ✓ Substitute zinc air or silver oxide batteries for your mercuric oxide (mercury-zinc) batteries.
- ✓ Eliminate the use of mercury thermometers
- ✓ When remodeling or replacing old equipment, consider replacing thermostats containing mercury switches with thermostats containing electronic type and snap switches, and replace “silent” light switches with mechanical light switches.
- ✓ Examine the use of mercury-containing switches in your own facility. Consider replacing these switches when replacing old equipment or remodeling:

Tilt Switches

Including SPST, SPDT, NO, NC, wide angle, omnidirectional, circuit board mount

- “man down” alarms
 - airflow/fan limit controls
 - fluid level control
 - pneumatic tube communication systems
 - pressure control
 - safety shut off- limit switches for industrial machinery
 - temperature control
- ✓ Purchase septic tank and sump pumps that contain magnetic dry reed switches, optic sensors, or mechanical switches instead of mercury tilt switches.
 - ✓ Research your use of plunger or displacement relays; consider replacing these relays with mechanical switches.

Displacement/Plunger Relays:

- industrial process controllers
 - high current/voltage lighting
 - power supply switching
 - resistance heating
 - tungsten lighting
 - welding
 - wetted reed relay/wetted reed switch: test, calibration, measurement equipment
- ✓ Examine use of other mercury-containing products in your facility and consider the alternatives for these:
 - generators
 - high intensity lamps
 - manometers

Loss prevention and housekeeping

- ✓ Label instruments containing mercury.
- ✓ Follow proper procedures when cleaning or refilling instruments that contain mercury. Instrument cleaning or refilling should take place in a well ventilated area, and, if possible, over a tray to contain any spills.
- ✓ Establish effective spill response measures to ensure mercury is handled in a safe and proper manner. To minimize the risk of an accidental spill, never handle mercury over a sink. The educational program for spill prevention and cleanup should be visual and simple. You may want to consider a video.

Recycling

- ✓ Establish a battery collection program.
- ✓ Continue to use fluorescent lamps! Even though fluorescent lamps contain mercury, they are a good choice because they use much less energy than regular bulbs. Consider the use of low-mercury fluorescent lamps; recycle your fluorescent lamps currently in use. Try not to break these lamps because some of the mercury will escape into the air.
- ✓ Contractors are in the unusual position of encountering a number of mercury-bearing products. The DNR will work to set up a state-wide collection system for thermostats and other equipment, similar to the program operating now in Minnesota.

Tips for recycling mercury

(from "Mercury in the Environment: The Waste Connection," MPCA, MDEQ, WDNR):

Store mercury waste from servicing manometers and other mercury-containing gauges in a covered, air tight container that will not break. Smaller vials can be stored in a larger covered, air-tight container, such as a five-gallon plastic pail.

Take the vials of liquid mercury to a collection site or arrange with a transporter to take them. to protect yourself from future liability, save the invoices that track your wastes and include the following:

- the date of the shipment
- the amount of waste
- the location from where the wastes are being shipped
- the destination of the shipment

Remove thermostat probes from the appliances you process and store them in a covered container marked "Mercury Thermostat Probes for Recycling." Then follow the same procedures outlined above for the recycling of liquid mercury.

SAMPLE PROCLAMATION

Your facility may wish to formally declare your commitment to mercury reduction. You may use the proclamation below, or adapt it to suit your needs.

WHEREAS mercury is an elemental substance, that once released into the environment, easily and rapidly changes forms to several organic and inorganic states that transfer from soil to air to water and back again;

WHEREAS the organic form of mercury, methylmercury, bioaccumulates in aquatic ecosystems to magnify concentrations in animal tissue in increasing degrees up to 250,000 times;

WHEREAS methylmercury, the most toxic form of mercury, can affect the reproductive efforts of top predators in aquatic environments such as loons, otters, mink, and panthers;

WHEREAS the neurotoxic effects of high levels of methylmercury poisoning in humans has been established, and low-level doses of methylmercury consumption can potentially effect human health, especially that of a fetus;

WHEREAS elemental mercury is a highly toxic substance which can vaporize easily and cause both acute and chronic health effects including severe respiratory irritation and damage to the central nervous system;

WHEREAS mercury has been identified internationally as a toxic substance of concern, and mercury contamination has led to fish consumption advisories for more than 235 lakes and 350 miles of rivers in Wisconsin;

WHEREAS the majority of mercury entering Wisconsin comes from anthropogenic sources, and one-quarter of these emissions are the result of the purposeful use of mercury;

WHEREAS mercury is used widely in consumer and industrial products, where, in most cases, alternative, mercury-free products are available;

WHEREAS pollution prevention or product substitution is a progressive approach to protecting the environment that eliminates or minimizes the generation of mercury-bearing waste, making it one of the most favorable strategies for maintaining a clean environment;

WHEREAS pollution prevention for mercury can help environmental conditions, as well as protect the health and safety of workers;

WHEREAS recognizing mercury minimization as an active opportunity to improve the environment of Wisconsin and the environment of our business, we, the undersigned, do hereby declare our business to be a mercury minimization participant;

WE commit to research the following mercury minimization opportunities in our facility and implement those we find most feasible:

Product Substitution

- ◆ Eliminate the use of mercury thermometers
- ◆ Substitute zinc air or silver oxide batteries for your mercuric oxide (mercury-zinc) batteries.
- ◆ Examine the use of mercury-containing switches and consider replacing these any mercury-containing items with non-mercury alternatives when replacing old equipment or remodeling:

Tilt Switches

Including SPST, SPDT, NO, NC, wide angle, omnidirectional, circuit board mount

- “silent” light switches
 - thermostats
 - “man down” alarms
 - airflow/fan limit controls
 - fluid level control
 - pneumatic tube communication systems
 - pressure control
 - safety shut off- limit switches for industrial machinery
 - temperature control
- ◆ Purchase septic tank and sump pumps that contain magnetic dry reed switches, optic sensors, or mechanical switches instead of mercury tilt switches.
 - ◆ Research use of plunger or displacement relays; consider replacing these relays with mechanical switches.

Displacement/Plunger Relays:

- industrial process controllers
 - high current/voltage lighting
 - power supply switching
 - resistance heating
 - tungsten lighting
 - welding
 - wetted reed relay/wetted reed switch: test, calibration, measurement equipment
- ◆ Examine use of other mercury-containing products and consider the alternatives for these:
 - generators
 - high intensity lamps
 - manometers

Loss prevention and housekeeping

- ◆ Label instruments containing mercury.
- ◆ Follow proper procedures when cleaning or refilling instruments that contain mercury.
- ◆ Establish effective spill response measures to ensure mercury is handled in a safe and proper manner.



Recycling

- ◆ Establish a battery collection program.
- ◆ Continue to use fluorescent lamps! Research the use of the new Alto™ bulb.
- ◆ Recycle or dispose of mercury-containing products in an environmentally sound manner
- ◆ Participate in a state-wide collection program for mercury-bearing products (thermostats, etc)

Facility

Name

Date Signed

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The information included in this pamphlet is essentially a compilation of the best mercury pollution prevention work to date. Information was gathered from the documents below; some material may have been quoted directly from these sources:

“Best Management Practices for Hospitals and Medical Facilities,” Palo Alto Regional Water Quality Control Plant, September 1994

“Business Waste Reduction and Recycling: A Guide For The Workplace,” Wisconsin DNR, 1995

“DNR Briefing Paper: How to Handle Your Waste Fluorescent Lamps and Incandescent Bulbs,” Wisconsin DNR 1995

“Household Batteries Waste Management Study,” by Gershman, Brickner, and Bratton, Inc., 1992

“Household Fluorescent Lights: A Household Hazardous Waste Fact Sheet,” MPCA, August 1994

“Hospital Mercury Work Group Operations Subcommittee Final Report,” Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) and MASCO Mercury Work Group, August 21, 1995

“Hospital Success Stories” (presentation), Jennifer Carver, University of Michigan Hospitals, presented at “Mercury Pollution Prevention: Healthcare Providers Protecting People and the Great Lakes,” Novi, Michigan October 4, 1996

“How to Design and Administer a Hospital Mercury Reduction Plan” (presentation), David Smith, Riverside Hospital, presented at “Mercury Pollution Prevention: Healthcare Providers Protecting People and the Great Lakes,” Novi, Michigan October 4, 1996

“Lake Superior Pollution Prevention Strategy Implementation Plan: Recommendations for Achieving Zero Discharge in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan,” Lake Superior Pollution Prevention Team, September 1995

“Managing Used Dry-Cell Batteries: A Household Hazardous Waste Fact Sheet,” MPCA

“Medical Waste Pollution Prevention: Keep Mercury Out of the Wastewater Stream,” USEPA Region 5, September 1995

“Mercury in Medical Waste,” fact sheets 1-3, USEPA Region 5, September 1995

“Mercury in the Environment: The Waste Connection,” MPCA, MDEQ, WDNR

“Mercury Pollution Prevention in the Health Care System,” conference notes compiled by Emily Moore, MPCA, April 1996

“Mercury Pollution Prevention Measures in Michigan Health Care Institutions,” Liz Krug and Guy Williams, The National Wildlife Federation

“Mercury Pollution Prevention in Michigan,” A Report by the Michigan Mercury Pollution Prevention Task Force, April, 1996

“Mercury Products Study,” John Gilkeson, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, May 1996

“Philips Unveils a Fluorescent Lamp With Less Mercury and a Long Life,” Wall Street Journal, June 9, 1995

“Preventing Mercury Waste Generation Through Comprehensive Environmental Management within the Healthcare Industry,” Steering Committee Meeting Summary Notes, April 1996

“Review of Defense National Stockpile Center Mercury Sales,” November 13, 1995

“Sources of Mercury in Healthcare Business,” Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, July 1995

“The Case Against Mercury: Rx for Pollution Prevention,” The Terrane Institute

“Waste Household Battery Management in Wisconsin,” SHWEC Waste Education Series

“Wisconsin Recycling Markets Directory,” Wisconsin DNR, May 1995

Current Mercury Work – Commercial

Business Outreach/Research	
Project:	<i>Pollution Prevention Opportunity Assessment and Database Needs Survey</i>
Description:	Target pollution prevention for small and medium sized businesses
Agencies working on this project:	University of MN - Duluth
Project:	<i>Small Business Technical Assistance Model</i>
Description:	Technical Assistance strategy for the Lake Superior Basin
Agencies working on this project:	MPCA/OEA WLSSD
Workgroups	
Project:	<i>Green Lights Program</i>
Description:	Encourages voluntary light bulb replacement, and promotes use of energy-efficient lighting
Agencies working on this project:	EPA