



# Making Medicine Mercury Free

Health Care Without Harm is a collaborative campaign of 170 organizations working together to eliminate pollution from health care practices without compromising safety or care. Health Care Without Harm is committed to transforming the health care industry so that it is no longer a source of environmental harm.

Mercury and other toxics are a threat to our local and global environment and we are committed to their immediate reduction and eventual elimination. Working with hospitals and others in the health care industry, we can stop this source of environmental harm and make our nation's hospitals models of environmental responsibility.

This brochure is designed to help health care providers initiate or accelerate programs to eliminate the use of mercury containing products. Please feel free to use or modify this information to help your institution make these important changes.

## Why Mercury Has No Business In The Health Care Business

Health care practices, especially medical waste incineration, are a leading source of mercury emissions and these emissions contaminate our food supply.

- Mercury is widely recognized as a dangerous and potent neurotoxin and reproductive toxin. Widespread mercury contamination of fish has resulted in 39 states issuing over 1,600 warnings against consuming fish caught in certain bodies of water. Mercury is a high-priority pollutant targeted by both the United States and Canada for the virtual elimination of human uses and releases.

- Mercury disposal is expensive and few disposal options are truly risk free. Some pose an additional potential human or environmental health impact. Disposing of mercury contaminated waste with a

hazardous waste company could mean that the waste is incinerated in a permitted hazardous waste facility, resulting in mercury emissions to the environment. Chemical recycling of mercury may keep it out of the environment in the short term, but ultimately the mercury in those products will need to be discarded.

The phase out of mercury containing products and their eventual elimination is the only way to keep mercury and its impacts out of the environment.

## What Is the Health Care Industry Doing About the Mercury Problem?

- The American Hospital Association (AHA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on hospital pollution prevention. The MOU commits to mercury elimination by the health care industry by 2005, minimizing the production of persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic pollutants, and reducing waste volumes by 50% by 2010.

- EPA Regional offices, State Hospital Associations, and many state agencies are working on mercury reduction/elimination programs. For instance, EPA New England is encouraging hospitals in the region to participate in the "Mercury Challenge Program" to find alternatives to using mercury in health care equipment and products. The state of Minnesota has made it a law that health care providers cannot give patients mercury thermometers.

## What Your Hospital Can Do – "Take the Mercury Pledge"

Taking the pledge to practice mercury free medicine demonstrates a commitment to "first, do no harm." Hospitals and other health care providers should treat mercury elimination as preventive medicine that protects health and the environment.

# A Pledge

## for Health Care Providers in Support of Becoming a Mercury Free Facility



*A pledge is a promise or agreement. This Mercury Free Pledge is a framework that outlines steps that must be taken by the health care industry to stop their contribution to mercury pollution.*

As a responsible provider of health care services, (your hospital) is committed to the health of our patients, our staff and their communities. We are aware that the health care industry has been identified as a major source of mercury pollution and that mercury is a threat that the health care industry can do something about. We are also aware that elemental mercury and mercury compounds are known to be hazardous to human health and the environment and that mercury is a potential source of exposure to patients, visitors and staff. We are committed to its immediate reduction and eventual elimination. Specifically, we are committed to the following measures to make our institution a model of environmental responsibility by phasing out the use of mercury and mercury containing products. We pledge to:

**Conduct a mercury audit** to identify all uses and sources of mercury in our institution.

**Commit to eliminate** the use of mercury by investigating opportunities to phase out mercury containing items where fewer barriers exist and immediate steps can be taken. For example, investigate replacing mercury-filled patient thermometers with digital or electronic thermometers; replacing mercury with water in Miller Abbott Tubes, replacing mercury containing "bougies or esophageal dilators" with silicon ones; replacing mercury-filled blood pressure measuring devices with aneroid units.

**Develop and approve** a resolution to support becoming a mercury free facility, see page 3.

**Develop and implement** a "Mercury Free Purchasing Policy." Assign materials management staff

to communicate with suppliers about the policy and to work with staff on finding non-mercury alternatives.

**Develop and implement** a program of waste segregation and recycling to further reduce the mercury waste stream in cases where no alternative products exists. For instance, mercury containing batteries and fluorescent light bulbs should be collected and processed for recycling.

**Develop a program** to collect all mercury containing wastes avoiding incineration and improper disposal.

**Educate staff** about the environmental and health consequences of the use of mercury in health care. Let the public know that we care about the environment and our communities and have taken aggressive measures to protect their health and eliminate our share of the mercury burden on the environment.

**Conduct an assessment** of the cost of our "mercury management program" and include cost of emergency preparedness and spill training, spill clean-up supplies, labor and hazardous material disposal costs.

**Collaborate with our state** hospital association and state department of environmental services to determine the regulatory status of mercury in your state.

We understand that this pledge is meant to be both an indication of our commitment to reducing the use of mercury, and of our intention to develop a comprehensive program to eliminate release of mercury to the environment. We are proud to join the many healthcare facilities across the nation that are participating in this important venture.

# A Resolution

In Support of a Mercury Free Initiative  
at "General Hospital and Clinic"



WHEREAS elemental mercury and mercury compounds are known to be hazardous to human health and the environment and are a potential source of exposure to patients, visitors and staff, and

WHEREAS the GENERAL HOSPITAL Hazard Communication Policy and the "*List Of Highly Restricted Hazardous Materials*" requires consideration of less hazardous alternatives, and (list any internal documents that support this resolution)

WHEREAS the GENERAL HOSPITAL Mission Statement confirms GENERAL HOSPITAL's commitment to improving environmental management throughout the organization, and that GENERAL HOSPITAL will manage, minimize and eliminate, whenever possible, the use of hazardous materials, and (this is stated on the hazardous material manifest for any large quantity generator).

WHEREAS GENERAL HOSPITAL has experienced (frequency) mercury spills since (date) resulting in a cost of \$\_\_\_\_\_ for cleanup, labor and disposal costs, and

WHEREAS there is widespread consensus that the (methyl) mercury levels commonly found in freshwater fish pose a health risk to the public and wildlife, and

WHEREAS GENERAL HOSPITAL is participating in the "AHA/EPA Memorandum of Understanding" process to eliminate mercury from healthcare, and

WHEREAS EPA New England is encouraging hospitals in the region to participate in the "Mercury Challenge Program" to find alternatives to using mercury in health care equipment and products, and (include any local, regional or state initiatives)

WHEREAS the EPA recognizes that incineration is a major contributor of man-made mercury emissions, and

WHEREAS GENERAL HOSPITAL continues to be committed to the health and welfare of the people and communities we serve and the environment we all share, and

WHEREAS there are recognized and widely accepted alternatives to mercury and mercury containing devices in healthcare.

NOW THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Environmental Resources Committee (or hospital "Green Team") and the Safety Committee hereby supports, endorses and commends all efforts consistent with institutional goals and financial considerations to eliminate and/or reduce mercury use at GENERAL HOSPITAL.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that GENERAL HOSPITAL will promptly initiate a program to collect all mercury containing wastes avoiding incineration and improper disposal, and should discontinue the purchase of mercury containing equipment where other non-hazardous alternatives are available, and should replace existing mercury devices with non-hazardous devices whenever possible, and strongly encourages the elimination or reduction of mercury and mercury compounds in any process or procedure performed at GENERAL HOSPITAL.

*Signed by Chairpersons of Safety Committee and  
for "Green Teams"*

# For More Information



## **Sustainable Hospitals Project Lowell Center for Sustainable Production**

Kitson Hall, Room 200 One University Avenue  
Lowell MA 01854

phone: (978) 934-2980

fax: (978) 452-5711

<http://www.uml.edu/centers/LCSP/hospitals/>

## **Other resources include printed materials:**

**Monroe County, New York Department of Health**  
*Reducing Mercury Use in Health Care, Promoting a  
Healthier Environment, A How-to Manual*  
(716) 292-3935

**City of Palo Alto Regional  
Water Quality Control Plant**  
*Pollution Prevention for Hospitals and Medical  
Facilities and Best Management Practices for  
Hospitals and Medical Facilities*  
Palo Alto Regional Water Quality Control Plant  
2501 Embarcadero Way, Palo Alto CA 94303  
(415) 329-2598

**National Wildlife Federation,  
Great Lakes Natural Resource Center**  
*Mercury Pollution Prevention in Healthcare:  
A Prescription for Success*  
NWF/Great Lakes Natural Resource Center  
506 East Liberty, 2nd Floor  
Ann Arbor MI 48104- 2210  
(734) 769-3351

**Terrine Institute**  
*The Case Against Mercury: Rx for Pollution Prevention*  
(poster and booklet)  
Terrine Institute, 4 Herbert Street, Alexandria VA 22305  
(703) 548-5473

## **Video:**

**Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance  
and the USEPA, Region 5**

*Mercury and the Healthcare Professional* (17 minutes)  
contact Emily Moore, Minnesota Office of  
Environmental Assistance,  
520 Lafayette Road N., 2nd Floor, St. Paul MN  
55155-4100, (612) 215-0201

## **Websites:**

Massachusetts Medical, Academic and Scientific  
Community Organization (MASCO)  
[www.masco.org/mercury](http://www.masco.org/mercury)

National Wildlife Federation  
[www.igc.org/nwf/greatlakes/pp/hosprpt](http://www.igc.org/nwf/greatlakes/pp/hosprpt)

United States Environmental Protection Agency  
[www.epa.gov/grtlakes/seahome/mercury/src/  
mercmed. htm](http://www.epa.gov/grtlakes/seahome/mercury/src/mercmed.htm)

*"Fishing for Trouble: A Survey of Mercury  
Contamination in America's Waterways,"* by  
U.S.PIRG, the Mercury Policy Project, and  
California Communities  
Against Toxics at [www.pirg.org](http://www.pirg.org).

and Health Care Without Harm's website at  
[www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org)

