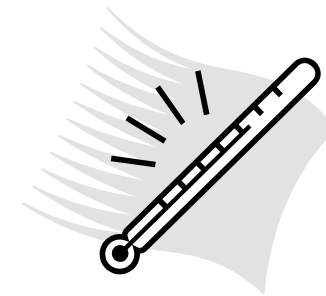


# Mercury

## Focus on Environmental Health Hazards



**GLOW Region Solid  
Waste Management  
Committee**

## Clean up of a Spill

- **Keep** people and pets away from the spill.
- **Minimize** the possibility of it vaporizing, turn off any heaters and turn up any air conditioners.
- **Ventilate** the area by opening windows. When possible, keep windows open for at least two days.

**NEVER** use a vacuum to clean up a spill. The mercury will contaminate the vacuum and the heat will cause additional distribution by evaporating it. **DON'T** use a broom either. The mercury will break into smaller beads and the broom will be contaminated.

**ASSEMBLE SUPPLIES** (before starting the clean up)

Rubber Gloves  
An Eyedropper  
Stiff Paper or Cardboard (2 pcs.)  
Two Plastic Bags  
Large Tray or Box  
Duct or Packing Tape  
Flashlight  
A Wide Mouth Container

Remember that any tools used will be contaminated and will have to be disposed of with the mercury.

**Do Not** touch the mercury and remember to remove all jewelry and watches before starting the clean up, as the mercury will bond with the metal. Using the gloves will minimize contact with the substance. The flashlight is used to locate

the mercury. The reflection of the light off the beads of mercury will make them easier to find.

**On a hard surface or tightly woven fabric**, use the stiff paper to push the beads together. Suction the beads with the eyedropper, or working over the tray to catch any spills, lift the beads with the stiff paper. Then place the mercury in the container. Pick up any remaining beads with the tape and place it, along with the paper and gloves in the plastic bag.

**On a carpet or rug**, the contaminated section should be cut out. The cut out section, along with the clean up items should be placed in the plastic bag.

**In a sink of water** mercury will sink to the bottom. Remove as much water as possible without disturbing the mercury and recover the mercury using a eyedropper. Place in the container, close and seal it.

**In a drain**, mercury will get caught in the sink trap. Working over a tray, remove the trap and pour the contents into the container. Close and seal the container.

## Disposal

Contact the GLOW Region Solid Waste Management Committee at (585) 344-2580 ext. 5463 or (800) 836-1154 for information on the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Program and/or options for disposal. Outside of the Genesee, Livingston and Wyoming Counties, contact your county solid waste department or solid waste management authority.

The following websites contain information on this and other environmental topics:

[www.noharm.com.org](http://www.noharm.com.org)  
[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)  
[www.dec.state.ny.us](http://www.dec.state.ny.us)

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# Focus on Environmental Health Hazards

**Mercury** is a potent neurotoxin that can affect the brain, spinal cord and kidneys. It affects the ability to see, feel, taste and move. It can cause fingers and toes to tingle, cause tunnel vision and create numbness around the mouth. Long term exposure can lead to stupor, coma and personality changes. In pregnant women, mercury can pass through the placenta, affecting fetal development and prevent the brain and nervous system from developing normally. The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention maintains that one in 10 women already have enough mercury in their blood to put a fetus at risk. Children affected exhibit lower intelligence, poor coordination, impaired hearing and delayed motor and verbal skills. The federal government advises women who are pregnant or expect to become pregnant to avoid eating mercury-contaminated fish. Wildlife, particularly fish and loons, are affected to the point that 39 states currently warn residents not to eat certain species of fish caught in some or all of the state's lakes, rivers and streams.

## Where is it found?

Mercury is found in thermometers, blood pressure devices, lab chemicals, cleaners and other health care products. In the home, it is commonly found in thermometers and thermostats. It is also found in automotive light switches.



## What is being done?

The use of mercury is to some extent being phased out. Most drug and department stores, by policy, no longer sell mercury thermometers. Health care facilities are also making a commitment to stop using it, over 1,400 of them to date. The goal of the Hospitals for a Healthy Environment program is to eliminate mercury from the health care waste stream as early as next year (2005).

## The Alternative

There are a number of alternatives to mercury thermometers. There are new digital, glass gallium-tin or glass alcohol thermometers. Inexpensive (but of questionable accuracy) flexible forehead thermometers and more expensive infrared ear thermometers are also available. According to the American Medical Association, the most important considerations in choosing a thermometer are how easy to use and read the thermometer is.

## A Spill Occurs

One of the hazards of continuing to use mercury thermometers is that they have the potential to break and release mercury. It is possible for them to break and release the mercury without anyone realizing it. The mercury can find its way into a crack in the floor, or into carpeting without it being visible. When not cleaned up it evaporates and contaminates indoor air. Even a small spill should be taken seriously.

**Detailed instructions on how to clean up a spill are listed on the reverse. Feel free to clip that section and put it on your refrigerator.**



## GLOW Region Solid Waste

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