



Mercury Thermometer Collection Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are mercury fever thermometers a problem?

Mercury fever thermometers are a potentially dangerous source of mercury. The amount of mercury in a thermometer can range from .5 to .7 grams. Nationally, they are one of the largest contributors of elemental mercury to the municipal solid waste stream and they present a risk of in home exposure to mercury vapor.

How can I tell if my thermometer has mercury?

Mercury is a silver-white to gray substance. If your thermometer is filled with a red liquid, your thermometer contains red dyed alcohol or mineral spirits and not mercury. These are safer alternatives to mercury fever thermometers.

Are there any special precautions I need to take when bringing in the thermometer?

The safest way of transporting your thermometer is to bring it in a rigid container. The original case or any other non-breakable container (plastic soft drink bottle, etc.) will work. For secondary containment, place the container in a Ziploc bag.

What should I do if mercury is spilled in my home?

Please refer to the fact sheet "[Broken Thermometer Cleanup-Guidance for Households](#)" from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Where can I find non-mercury thermometers?

Most pharmacies and grocery stores carry non-mercury thermometers. Additionally, the following vendors carry digital thermometers:

- Becton Dickenson - www.bd.com
- PolyMedica Corporation - www.polymedica.com
- Omron Healthcare, Inc. - www.omronhealthcare.com

Can I bring in other mercury containing products from my home?

No. This project only has the capacity to handle thermometers. Contact your local health department or the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at 1-888-569-1831 ext 3320 to see if your community has an ongoing [Household Hazardous Waste Collection program](#) or to obtain a [list of mercury recyclers](#) in your area.

What other sources of mercury may be in my home?

There are a variety of other items in the household that contain mercury:

- Thermostats (non-electronic)
- Switches and relays (sump and bilge pumps, car trunk light switches, electric space heaters)
- Fluorescent light bulbs and other mercury vapor lighting (high-pressure sodium and neon bulbs)
- Automotive headlamps
- Pilot light sensors in gas appliances (furnaces, space heaters, water heaters, stoves, and ovens)
- Gauges (manometers, barometers, blood pressure gauges)
- Clothes irons
- Shoes with flashing lights in soles
- Button cell batteries (mercuric-oxide, zinc-air, silver oxide, alkaline manganese) that are commonly found in watches, hearing aids, calculators and digital thermometers.
- Paint (latex before 1990 and some oil base paints)
- Antibacterial products that contain thimerosal or merbromin

Though these items are not an immediate risk, you should be aware of them so that you can look for non-mercury replacements in the future.

What else can I do to decrease the amount of mercury in the environment?

Purchasing mercury free products and ensuring that you dispose of mercury containing items properly are the most important ways you can help. Many mercury-free substitutes are now available to the consumer, including digital thermometers and rechargeable batteries.

Is it all right to eat fish?

Fish offer many dietary benefits but should be consumed in moderation. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment recommends limiting your consumption to four meals of fish per month for non-pregnant adults and one meal per month for women who are pregnant, nursing or planning to become pregnant and children 9 years of age or younger. One meal for an adult is considered to be 6 ounces of cooked fish (8 ounces of uncooked fish) and for a child to be 2 ounces of cooked fish (3 ounces of uncooked fish) (US EPA).

The US FDA and the US EPA have also made recommendations for commercial fish consumption and keep a list of mercury levels found in individual species of fish. You can access this database at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/sea-mehg.html> .

Where can I find information about fish consumption advisories in my area?

The EPA maintains a database of fish advisories issued throughout the US. Mercury consumption advisories are listed by state and are available under the national listing of advisories at: <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish/>.

Additionally, the Water Quality Control Division of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment lists fish consumption advisories for the state at: <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/wq/FishCon/FishCon.htm> and can answer other questions about mercury in fish at (303)-692-3500.

What happens to the thermometers collected for this project?

The thermometers will be shipped to Tri-County Health Department for consolidation and then they will be sent to a mercury recycler.

References:

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