

WHAT TO DO IF A MERCURY THERMOMETER BREAKS?

NOTE: These instructions also apply to spills from other sources, if the amount spilled is less than or similar to the amount in a thermometer.

The elemental or metallic mercury is a liquid metal used in thermometers, blood pressure gauges, lamps, barometers, thermostats, electrical switches and other common products.

Mercury is a metal which is liquid at room temperature, and it is easily evaporated above all in warm or poorly-ventilated rooms or spaces. When elemental mercury is spilled or a device containing mercury breaks, the exposed elemental mercury can evaporate and become an invisible, odorless toxic vapor. This happens with the most known devices such as barometers, blood pressure gauges, thermometers, etc. Both the breakage as the mismanagement of these devices represents a risk to the human health and the environment.

Inorganic mercury is the liquid metal used in thermometers. In the case of a mercury thermometer breakage, the respiratory exposure has a minimum importance and it can be minimized with the following guidelines.

You can prevent potential mercury exposure to you and your environment by:

- Storing and handling responsibly products that contain mercury.
- What to do if a mercury thermometer breaks.
- Following our tips **to clean up mercury spills**, and recycling or otherwise properly disposing of products that contain mercury.
- What **NOT** to do after a mercury spill.

RECOMMENDATIONS FACING A SMALL MERCURY SPILL

WHAT TO DO?

Do not walk around the mercury disposal area to try to avoid its scatter.

Have everyone else leave the mercury disposal area. Only people who will clean up the mercury spill have to be in this area. Do not let anyone walk through the mercury on their way out

Turn off the air conditioning to avoid the dispersion of mercury vapor.

Ventilate the area by opening all windows and doors to the outside, and shutting all doors to other parts of the house.

Mercury can be cleaned up easily from surfaces such as wood, linoleum, tile and any similarly smooth surfaces.

If a spill occurs on carpet, curtains, upholstery or other absorbent surfaces, these contaminated items should be thrown away. Only cut and remove the affected portion of the contaminated carpet for disposal.

Avoid the direct contact with skin.

WHAT NEVER TO DO?

Never use a vacuum cleaner to clean up mercury. The vacuum will put mercury into the air and increase exposure.

Never use a broom to clean up mercury. It will break the mercury into smaller droplets and spread them.

Never pour mercury down a drain. It may lodge in the plumbing and cause future problems during plumbing repairs.

Never wash clothing or other items that have come **in direct contact with mercury** in a washing machine, because mercury may contaminate the machine and/or pollute sewage.

Clothing that has come into direct contact with mercury should be discarded. By "direct contact," we mean that mercury was (or has been) spilled directly on the clothing, for example, if you break a mercury thermometer and some of elemental mercury beads came in contact with your clothing.



DO NOT allow children to help you clean up the spill.

ITEMS NEEDED TO CLEAN UP A SMALL MERCURY SPILL

The following things are needed to the correct clean of a small mercury spill:

1. ziplock-type bags
2. plastic bags (20 micrometers of minimum thick)
3. rubber, nitrile or latex gloves
4. paper towels
5. plastic containers with adjustable lid, such as typical urine collection cups
6. eyedropper or syringe
7. duct tape
8. flashlight

CLEANUP INSTRUCTIONS

Firstly, take all your jewels off to avoid the formation of mercury amalgams with them.

Put on rubber, nitrile or latex gloves and if possible, disposable tunic and disposable shoe covers.

Have everyone else leave the area. Open all windows and doors to the outside; shut all doors to other parts of the house. Turn down the temperature.

If there are any broken pieces of glass or sharp objects, pick them up with care. Place all broken objects on a paper towel. Fold the paper towel and place in a zip lock bag. Secure the bag and label it.

Mercury can be cleaned up easily from the following surfaces: wood, linoleum, tile and any similarly smooth surfaces. If a spill occurs on carpet, curtains, upholstery or other absorbent surfaces, these contaminated items should be thrown away in accordance with the disposal means outlined below. Only cut and remove the affected portion of the contaminated carpet for disposal.

Locate visible mercury beads. Use a squeegee or cardboard to gather mercury beads, and use the eyedropper to collect or draw up the mercury beads. Use slow sweeping motions to keep mercury from becoming uncontrollable. Place mercury beads in plastic containers with adjustable lid.

Take a flashlight, hold it at a low angle close to the floor in a darkened room and look for additional glistening beads of mercury that may be sticking to the surface or in small cracked areas of the surface.

After you remove larger beads, use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick smaller mercury beads or any remaining small glass fragments. Fold the sticky tape and place it in a zip lock bag and secure.

Place all materials used with the cleanup, including gloves, in a trash bag. Place all mercury beads and objects into the plastic bag, which has 20 micrometers of minimum thick. Secure the plastic bag and label it.

Contact your local environmental or health authority for proper disposal in accordance with the laws.

Remember to keep the area well ventilated to the outside (i.e., windows open and fans in exterior windows running) for at least 2 hours after your successful cleanup.