

Mercury Spill and Cleanup Information

Mercury can be found in a variety of household, commercial and industrial items such as fever thermometers, thermostats, and irons. Mercury is toxic to humans and wildlife and should be managed properly. When liquid (elemental) mercury is spilled, it forms beads or droplets that can accumulate in the tiniest places. These droplets can emit vapors into the air that we cannot see or smell. Breathing mercury vapors can be **VERY** dangerous; depending upon how much mercury is in the air and how long you breathe the contaminated air.

Most small mercury spills (fever thermometers) can be cleaned up easily. Please follow these instructions carefully for cleaning up a small household mercury spill.

- Be sure to secure the area for prevent further contamination spread.
- Keep the room under 70 degrees F to minimize mercury evaporation.
- Close inside doors but open exterior doors or windows and move air through.
- Don't spread the contamination by walking to other rooms in the house.
- Use a flashlight to look for mercury beads, the light will reflect off the shiny mercury beads. For best results, turn off other lights in the area.
- Contain the spill by mounding disposable rags around the spill.
- Push the mercury beads together with a card or stiff paper. Mercury beads roll very quickly, so be careful!
- Use an eyedropper or turkey baster to pick up the beads.
- Collect all mercury into a leak-tight plastic bag or a wide mouth sturdy plastic container with a screw on lid.
- Recheck the area with your flashlight.
- Optional step: sprinkle sulfur powder on the spill area. If the powder changes from yellow to brown, more cleanup is necessary. If the powder stays yellow, cleanup was successful!

Suggested equipment and supplies for a mercury spill

- Latex or rubber gloves
- Tweezers (for picking up any glass particles)
- Goggles to protect your eyes
- Damp paper towels to contain the spill
- Rubber squeegee
- Plastic dust pan, index cards, playing cards, or other rigid paper
- Zipper-shut plastic baggies, or wide-mouth container and lid and plastic trash bags
- Flashlight
- Eyedropper or other suction device
- You may also use electrical tape to "pick up" mercury, just be careful because they don't always stick.

If the mercury was spilled over a drain or sink that goes to your wastewater treatment plant or septic system, you will need to look in the "S" trap for liquid mercury. If the mercury is in your plumbing, it will slowly evaporate into your house. Be careful when

taking apart your plumbing, mercury is very slippery and will easily spill out of the trap! Work over a large plastic tray or bucket. Place the trap and its contents in a sealable plastic container and install a new trap.

Some Things you should NEVER do when cleaning up mercury...

NEVER use an ordinary vacuum or shop vacuum...vapors will be blown around and the sweeper will become contaminated.

NEVER use a broom or paintbrush...you will break the mercury into even smaller beads and further scatter the mercury.

NEVER use household cleaning products, especially those containing chlorine or ammonia...a violent reaction may occur, further increasing the release of toxic fumes.

NEVER allow people with contaminated shoes or clothing to walk around your house.

NEVER put mercury in the trash.

NEVER put mercury in a burn barrel.

NEVER pour or allow mercury to go down the drain.

Get an experienced professional to clean up big spills! A spill is considered "big" if it contains two tablespoons or more of mercury. A spill of this magnitude in a household should be considered very serious. If the mercury spill is on a porous surfaces, such as carpet, or if the mercury droplets are widely dispersed in a room, it is best to call for professional assistance immediately.

IDEM Spill Hotline

1.888.233.7745

1.800.988.7901