

Web resources

www.hennepin.us/environment

Hennepin County – Information for residents on year-round drop-off facilities for household hazardous wastes, seasonal collection events and how to reduce the amount and toxicity of household hazardous products in your home.

www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/p-p2s4-07.pdf

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency – Information on keeping your family safe from mercury.

www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/hhw-mercuryspills.pdf

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency – Information on cleaning up spilled mercury in the home.

www.epa.gov/epawaste/hazard/tsd/mercury/con-prod.htm

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – A table of products that may contain mercury, recommended management options and information on non-mercury alternative products.

www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/fish/index.html

The Minnesota Department of Health – Guidelines for the safe consumption of fish.



www.hennepin.us search: A to Z

Reducing waste and recycling is making Hennepin a **COOL county**.

Attention.....If you want help translating this information, call 612-348-3777

Atención.....Si desea recibir asistencia gratuita para traducir esta información, llame 612-348-3777

OgowHaddii aad dooneyso in lagaa kaalmeeyo tarjamadda macluumaadkani oo lacedg la' aan wac 612-348-3777

Ceeb toom.....Yog koj xav tau kev pab txahb cov xov no rau koj dawb, hu 612-348-3777

TDD/TTY 612-596-6985

Hg

Elemental or metallic mercury is a shiny, silver-white metal that is liquid at room temperature. At room temperature when it is not contained, elemental mercury slowly evaporates into the atmosphere. The resulting vapors are colorless and odorless and can be more readily absorbed by the body. Inhaling a large amount of mercury vapor can result in damage to the central nervous system, kidneys and liver and even death.

Methylmercury, a potent neurotoxin, is the mercury compound of greatest concern. It hampers the development of the nervous systems of fetuses and young children and in severe cases causes irreversible brain damage. After mercury is released into the atmosphere, it can settle in water where microorganisms convert it to methylmercury. When these microorganisms are consumed by fish, the mercury builds up in the flesh of the fish. Humans and wildlife are exposed to methylmercury primarily through eating fish. Visit www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/fish/index.html for the Minnesota Department of Health guidelines on the safe consumption of fish.



Mercury and mercury-containing products



Mercury, which is found in some common household products, is a concern because exposure to it can be harmful to humans and animals. This shiny, silver metal was once widely used in manufacturing, agriculture and other industries. It has been used as a conductor of electricity, a standard to measure temperature and pressure, a medication and pesticide to kill biological organisms, and as a catalyst to cause or prevent chemical reactions. It is now considered a dangerous pollutant.



Where is mercury found in the environment?

Mercury is a naturally occurring element found in soil, water and the air. There are trace amounts of mercury in virtually every living thing, as well as in coal and petroleum – the fossil remains of living things. However, mercury is not an essential nutrient for any form of life.

Although some mercury is released into the environment from natural sources, such as volcanoes and geothermal activity, the majority of mercury releases are from man-made sources. These sources include emissions from coal-burning power plants, manufacturing processes and the improper disposal of mercury-containing products.

What health hazards are posed by mercury?

Mercury is a neurotoxin that damages or destroys nerve tissue at high concentrations. Pregnant women and nursing mothers should be especially careful to avoid exposure to mercury, and parents should ensure that young children are not exposed to it. Mercury affects all animals – humans and wildlife alike.

All forms of mercury are toxic when taken into the body, but they are not equally likely to be absorbed.

What products contain mercury?

Many commonly used household products contain mercury. There is no danger of exposure to it if these products are used appropriately and disposed of properly. Breakage or damage may allow mercury to escape, so handle these products with care.

Some common household products that contain mercury include:

- Appliances
- Button batteries
- Electric relays
- Electronics
- Thermostats
- Thermometers
- Fluorescent light bulbs
- Measurement and control devices
- Tilt switches in silent light switches, security systems, space heaters and automobile hood switches

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has more information on products that contain mercury, how to manage them and how to find alternatives on their website, www.epa.gov

How do I properly dispose of mercury-containing products?

In Minnesota it is illegal to place any mercury-containing product or device in the trash or wastewater disposal system. All items containing mercury must be recycled.

Hennepin County accepts all types of mercury-containing products from households – free of charge – at the county drop-off facilities in Brooklyn Park and Bloomington. For more information visit www.hennepin.us/dropoffs or call 612-348-3777.

How can I help protect my family and the environment from mercury exposure?

Buy non mercury-containing products.

Alternatives are available for many products, such as alcohol (those with a red tip) or digital thermometers and electronic thermostats.

Properly dispose of mercury-containing products.

Mercury-containing products that are thrown in the trash end up at landfills or waste-to-energy facilities where the mercury can be released into the environment and contribute to air and water pollution.

Conserve energy. Emissions from coal-burning power plants are one of the largest sources of mercury in the environment. Reducing energy consumption and the amount of coal that power plants need to burn to meet energy demands will help reduce mercury emissions.

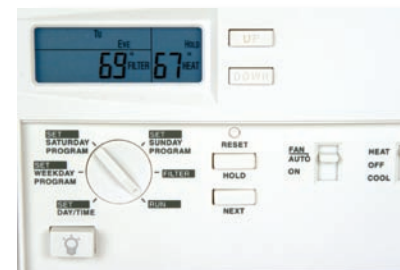
How do I deal with a mercury spill at home?

If someone breaks a mercury-containing device or spills mercury, do not vacuum the mercury or do anything to heat it. Call the Minnesota Duty Officer at 1-800-422-0798 or follow the directions in *Cleaning up mercury spills in the home*, which is listed in web resources on the next page.



You can reduce mercury in your home by purchasing non mercury-containing alternatives such as an alcohol thermometer.

Mercury in the environment accumulates in the flesh of fish. Dangerously high levels of mercury in fish results in fish consumption guidelines.



You can remove mercury from your home by replacing your thermostat with a non-mercury-containing, digital alternative. Dispose of your old thermostat at a Hennepin County drop-off facility.