

MERCURY DISPOSAL



What is Mercury?

Mercury is a metal that is liquid at room temperature, easily conducts electricity, and expands and contracts evenly with temperature changes. It has been used in thousands of industrial, agricultural, medical, and household applications.

Unfortunately, mercury is also a toxic substance that builds up in the environment instead of dissipating over time. It can negatively affect the health of humans and wildlife that come in contact with it. Lakes and rivers can become contaminated when there is a direct discharge of mercury-containing industrial waste or municipal sewage. Mercury released to air from burned or buried waste can also end up in water bodies. Biologists sampling fish in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin found mercury in high levels as long ago as the mid-1970s. Because mercury accumulates in the fish that we eat (especially large fish), it may eventually end up on the dinner table.

Although mercury can be useful (*especially in energy-saving fluorescent lights*) it can pose a very real health risk, from direct exposure to mercury or from eating contaminated fish. **We can minimize this risk by reducing our use of mercury-containing products and properly disposing of mercury-containing waste.**
What Products Do I Use That Contain Mercury?

Mercury is found in many household, medical, and industrial products. Examples of mercury-containing items that may be found in your home are:

- **Thermostats** — Most old thermostats contain mercury in a small glass vial. Mercury thermostats are still sold, but non-mercury thermostats are also available. Non-mercury, programmable thermostats save energy.
- **Switches** — Mercury was used in light switches, especially “silent switches” manufactured before 1991. Other electrical applications include switches and flame sensors in certain appliances.
- **Thermometers** — Many fever thermometers and indoor/outdoor thermometers made with mercury are still in use. Mercury thermometers contain a silvery-grey liquid. Digital thermometers and those with red liquid do not contain mercury.
- **Fluorescent and high-intensity discharge lamps** — Conventional wisdom recommends using these lamps to save energy but you must dispose of them properly. For disposal information visit the web site below:
 - http://epa.ohio.gov/portals/47/facts/cfl_consumer_info.pdf

Many of these mercury uses, such as thermostats, are not dangerous as long as the mercury is enclosed and protected from release. However, thermometers can be broken, and liquid mercury is dangerous because of the high likelihood of spills and exposure to humans and pets. It is always safest to avoid having mercury around the house.

Remember

- Stay informed, know where mercury is found.
- Avoid buying products containing mercury.
- Dispose of mercury-containing products properly.

Never vacuum or sweep spilled mercury, and don't pour it down a drain.

Proper Disposal of Mercury Waste

The City of Bedford Heights Service Department accepts mercury-containing products from residential property only at the service garage located on Solon Road, as part of the hazardous waste collection as long as the mercury waste has been properly packaged in at least two plastic bags for disposal.