



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Household Products Containing Mercury

What is Mercury?

Mercury - known as "Hg" to chemists, is a naturally occurring element. It is a metal and conducts electricity. It is a liquid at room temperature, combines easily with other metals and expands and contracts evenly with temperature changes. Because of these properties, mercury has been used in many household, medical and industrial products.

Although mercury performs many useful functions in our workplaces and homes, it is toxic and can impair our health. Mercury acts as a poison to the central nervous system in humans. Children, especially those under the age of 6, are more susceptible to mercury poisoning. Mercury evaporates slowly at room temperature. If spilled or improperly stored, this evaporation will cause continuous contamination of the air we breathe.

How Mercury Enters the Food Chain

Mercury from manmade and natural sources mixes with rain and snow and falls into lakes and waterways. When mercury is deposited in lakes or waterways, bacteria convert it to methylmercury. Methylmercury contaminates the food chain and builds up in the tissue of fish and wildlife and humans who eat the fish.



Improper mercury disposal includes pouring it down the drain, putting it in the trash and burning it in barrels and incinerators. These improper disposal methods can elevate mercury contamination in the environment.

Fish Advisory



The Connecticut Department of Public Health and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection have issued fish advisories that place limits on safe quantities for consumption. Pregnant women, women planning to become pregnant and children under 6 years old must be especially careful. They should not eat bass and pickerel from Dodge Pond, Lake McDonough, Silver Lake, and Lake Wyassup. All others are advised to limit consumption to one meal per month of fish except trout from these and all other freshwater waterbodies in Connecticut.

Fish Consumption Advisory - [A Guide to Safe Eating of Fish Caught in Connecticut](#) **EXIT DEP**

Household Items That May Contain Mercury:

- **Thermometers** - typically contain about ½ gram of this silver colored liquid (non-mercury alternatives are available)

- **Thermostats** - inside the sealed glass "tilt switch" (not the newer electronic kind)
- **Automotive headlamps** (ONLY the ones with the blue tint when lit)
- **Pilot light sensors** - in SOME gas appliances such as stoves, ovens, clothes dryers, water heaters, furnaces and space heaters
- **Gauges** - barometers, manometers, blood pressure and vacuum gauges ONLY with silver colored liquid
- **Electrical switches and relays** - typically contains about 3.5 grams of mercury in SOME chest freezers, pre-1972 washing machines, sump pumps, electric space heaters, clothes irons, silent light switches and automatic car hood & trunk lights.
- **Some athletic shoes** (made before 1997 ONLY) with flashing lights in soles
- **Vintage toys & games** - toy drawing screens and mercury maze games
- **Fluorescent bulbs and other mercury vapor lighting** - HID (high intensity discharge), metal halide, high pressure sodium and neon bulbs (environmentally preferable because they are more energy-efficient)



Use Mercury-free Products

Use Caution Around Mercury:

- Never break open products that contain mercury.
- Do not pour mercury down the drain.
- Never burn mercury-containing products.
- Do not put mercury-containing products in the trash.
- Always properly recycle mercury-containing products at a household hazardous waste collection.

If You Have a Mercury Spill:

- Ventilate and evacuate room where spill occurred.
- Never try to vacuum up spilled mercury.
- Wearing gloves, scoop up any spilled mercury into a small airtight container and bring to the next local household hazardous waste collection.

If you have questions regarding potential mercury poisoning, call the Poison Control Center at the UCONN Health Center at 1-800-222-1222.

For mercury spills, call the Department's Oil and Chemical Spill Response Division at (860) 424-3338.

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