



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS – For Businesses

Fact Sheet No. SHWMB 04-1 (02/09)

Please remember this fact sheet serves only as a guide and does not replace the requirements of Delaware's Regulations Governing Hazardous Waste.

MERCURY WASTE

1. What is Mercury?

Elemental mercury is liquid at room temperature, with a metallic and shiny appearance. It is conductive and highly volatile.

2. How does mercury affect human health and the environment?

Exposure to high levels of mercury has been linked to nervous system and developmental problems in humans, especially children. Depending on the amount of exposure, health effects can range from minor losses of sensation or mental ability to tremors, inability to walk, convulsions and even death.

Improper treatment, disposal and management of mercury-bearing wastes, mercury-containing devices and elemental mercury can contribute to mercury exposures. Mercury vapor released in the air eventually settles into water or onto land where it can later be washed into water. Once mercury enters water, biological processes transform it to a highly toxic form (methylmercury) that builds up in fish and animals that eat fish. People are exposed to mercury primarily by eating fish, which can potentially result in health problems.

3. What Devices Contain Mercury?

While not a complete list, the following mercury-containing devices are commonly found in most buildings.

- Fluorescent Lamps (including Tanning Bed Lamps)
- Mercury-Containing Switches (Lighting, Refrigerators, Freezers, Other Appliances)
- Mercury-Containing Thermostats
- Silent Wall Switches
- Commercial/Industrial Heating & Cooling Equipment
- Elemental Mercury and Compounds
- Freezers
- Mercury-Containing Float Switches
- Mercury-Containing Gas-Fired Devices with Pilot Lights and Flame Sensors (ex. Gas Ranges and Ovens)
- Mercury-Containing Manometers/Barometers
- Mercury in Pipes at dentist offices in the form of amalgam
- Mercury Thermometers



4. What is the Universal Waste Rule? How does it pertain to mercury containing devices?

Please see Fact Sheet No. SHWMB 00-1, Universal Waste Rule.

5. I have many mercury containing devices such as thermostats that I need to remove. How can I manage these?

While mercury containing devices can be managed as hazardous waste, the universal waste rule is designed to simplify their management. When managing mercury containing devices as universal waste you need:

A. Store the devices in a suitable leak proof, airtight container, labeled “Universal Waste – Mercury Containing Equipment,” “Waste Mercury – Containing Equipment,” or “Used Mercury – Containing Equipment.”

B. If breakage occurs see item 6 of this fact sheet.

C. Either:

- Send or take devices to a mercury recycler. Discuss proper shipping methods with the recycler, or
- Take advantage of subsidized mercury collection/drop-off services for small businesses if your city, county, or state environmental or solid waste program offers them.

6. What Should I do if I have a mercury spill?

When liquid mercury is spilled, it forms droplets that can accumulate in the tiniest of spaces and then emit vapors into the air. Mercury vapor in the air is odorless, colorless, and very toxic. Most mercury exposures occur by breathing vapors, by direct skin contact or by eating food or drinking water contaminated with mercury.

Be careful to keep devices from breaking and releasing mercury into the environment. Health problems caused by mercury depend on how much has entered your body, how it entered your body, how long you have been exposed and how your body responds to the mercury. All mercury spills, regardless of quantity, should be treated seriously. The Department of Public Health is available to assist you; telephone Dr. Llewellyn at 302.744.4540.

7. I have mercury thermometers in my household. Who can I contact to accept these?

The Delaware Solid Waste Authority (DSWA) regularly performs household hazardous waste collections for wastes such as this. You can contact the DSWA at 800.404.7080, or www.dswa.com.

8. How can I dispose of my fluorescent lamps?

Please see Fact Sheet No. SHWMB 96-1 Fluorescent Lamps. The *Delaware Regulations Governing Hazardous Waste* prohibit disposal of any hazardous waste into a solid waste landfill, such as those operated by the Delaware Solid Waste Authority. Delaware generators of hazardous waste may not use these landfills as a disposal option.



9. **If I manage my waste mercury or mercury containing devices as hazardous waste, can they be accumulated in a satellite accumulation area?**

The Universal Waste Rule is designed to simplify the management of mercury containing devices however; you may manage these wastes as hazardous waste in the satellite accumulation area.

Section 262.34(c)(1) of the Delaware Regulations Governing Hazardous Waste states in part:

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"A generator may accumulate as much as 55 gallons of hazardous waste in containers ... at or near the point of generation where wastes initially accumulate, which is under the control of the operator of the process generating the waste, without a permit ... provided he:

(i) Complies with §§ 265.171, 265.172, and 265.173(a) of these Regulations; and

(ii) Marks his containers either with the words 'Hazardous Waste' or with other words that identify the contents of the containers."

All containers are to be closed unless waste is being added. The containers must be compatible with the waste within and maintained in good condition.