

## DEQ's Mercury Reduction Strategy

### Background

Reducing the potential for exposure to toxics is one of DEQ's four strategic priorities. This effort includes informing Oregonians about what toxics are and how they can be reduced, as well as working with stakeholders to find cost-effective, comprehensive solutions to reducing toxic pollutants. DEQ's effort is focused initially on mercury because mercury is highly toxic and lasts a long time in the environment.

In December 2002, DEQ completed and presented its initial *Mercury Reduction Strategy Report* to the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission (EQC). DEQ's report and recommendations are summarized below. The report may be found on DEQ's Web site at: [www.deq.state.or.us/programs/mercury.htm](http://www.deq.state.or.us/programs/mercury.htm)

### About mercury and mercury sources

Mercury is a naturally occurring metallic element. Mercury may be converted by bacteria to a highly toxic organic form known as methyl mercury. Methyl mercury has been detected in fish tissue at concentrations that may pose a threat to human health in a number of Oregon watersheds, including the main stem of the Willamette River.

There are three categories of Mercury sources:

- **Products.** Many commonly used products contain mercury. These include thermostats, fluorescent lamps, thermometers, automobile switches and dental amalgam. These products can be discarded and disposed of in landfills.
- **Point sources.** Mercury is released to the air and water from many regulated "point sources" within Oregon. These include publicly operated treatment works (POTWs), power plants and manufacturing facilities. Some point sources may "pass through" mercury. For example, mercury from every day products such as laundry detergent is discharged from POTWs.
- **Non-point sources.** Non-point sources include abandoned gold and mercury mines, as well as air emissions from motor vehicles.

### DEQ's mercury reduction strategy

DEQ is committed to moving forward to reduce mercury releases in Oregon. Currently, these resources are focused on coordinating agency toxic chemical reduction efforts, completing the

mercury Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) pollution load limit for the Willamette River, development of air toxics rules, and cleanup of abandoned mine sites.

### Activities to reduce mercury

DEQ is working collaboratively with interested parties to verify mercury estimates and begin activities to further reduce mercury sources. Specific activities include:

- Working with interested parties, including trade associations and sources, to review and improve preliminary estimates of mercury releases in Oregon.
- Water quality monitoring work for mercury as part of the Willamette River TMDL process.
- Initiating an EPA grant funded study to better quantify the amount of mercury discharged from industrial and municipal sources.
- Working with automobile shops and recyclers to encourage the removal of mercury switches from motor vehicles.
- Participating in household hazardous waste collection events that include mercury thermometer collection.
- Providing grants supporting fluorescent light tube recycling.
- Investigating and cleaning up abandoned mine sites.
- Continuing efforts to promote public awareness of risks associated with mercury exposure and ways to reduce releases of mercury to the environment.

A follow-up report to the Environmental Quality Commission, expected to be completed in late 2003, will include DEQ's specific approach to mercury reduction and a detailed outline on how to measure progress.

### For more information

For additional questions regarding mercury reduction in Oregon, please contact Bob Danko, Portland, at (503) 229-6266

### Alternative formats

Alternative formats of this document (such as Braille or large type), can be made available by contacting DEQ's Office of Communications and Outreach, Portland, at (503) 229-5317.



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Department of  
Environmental  
Quality

### DEQ Cross Programs

811 SW 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Portland, OR 97204  
Phone: (503) 229-6266  
(800) 452-4011  
Fax: (503) 229-6977  
Contact: Bob Danko  
[www.deq.state.or.us](http://www.deq.state.or.us)