

Common Products Containing Mercury

Background

Mercury is a naturally occurring metallic element. Mercury can also be converted to methyl mercury in the environment. Methyl mercury is highly toxic and tends to concentrate in fish tissue. In Oregon, the concentration of mercury in fish tissue may pose a risk to people who consume fish frequently. The Oregon Department of Human Services has issued fish advisories for a number of Oregon Watersheds: <http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/esc/fishadv.cfm>

Mercury in Products

Mercury can be found in a variety of household products such as fever thermometers, fluorescent light tubes, thermostats and irons. Also, some hobbyists may use liquid mercury to refine gold.

Common Mercury Containing Items:

Thermometers

- Fever thermometers contain approximately 0.5 grams of mercury per thermometer.
- Laboratory thermometers contain approximately 3 grams of mercury per thermometer.

Thermostats

- Non-Electronic thermostats contain approximately 3 g of mercury per switch. Some thermostats may contain more than one switch.

Switches and Relays

- Float switches used in sump pumps and septic systems contain approximately 2 grams of mercury each.
- Silent Wall Switches (look like typical wall switches manufactured before 1991) contain approximately 2 grams of mercury each.
- Other Electrical Tilt Switches-washer lids, chest freezers manufactured before 2001, may contain 3.5 grams each.
- Automobile Switches contain approximately 0.6 – 1 grams each (convenience lighting in trunks and engine compartments).

Fluorescent Lights

- Fluorescent light tubes contain 4 to 50 mg each.
- Compact fluorescent light bulbs contain approximately 4 to 8 mg each.

- High Intensity Discharge Headlamps contain 20 to 250 mg each.

Thermostat Probes

- Thermostat probes containing mercury may be found gas-fired appliances that have pilot lights such as ranges, ovens, clothes dryers, water heaters, furnaces and space heaters.

Gauges

- Blood Pressure measuring gauges
- Barometers

Button Batteries

- New button batteries contain approximately 25 mg of mercury. Button batteries manufactured before 1996 contain significantly more.

Mercury-containing Necklaces

- The colorful necklaces are often on a beaded chain, cord or leather strand with a glass pendant filled with liquid mercury, and they may also contain brightly colored liquid. They come in various shapes such as hearts, bottles, saber teeth and chili pepper. The pendants are fragile and can easily break, spilling liquid mercury.

For more information

For additional questions regarding mercury reduction in Oregon, please contact Eric Blischke at (503) 229-5648.

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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