

Mercury-Added Products

Why is Mercury An Issue?

Mercury is a nerve toxin and is considered a hazardous waste. It accumulates in the tissues of fish and other organisms inhabiting mercury-contaminated waters. Humans are exposed to mercury primarily by eating mercury-contaminated fish. Mercury exposure is particularly significant for the developing neurological systems of young children and can cause lowered intelligence, impaired hearing, and poor coordination.

Mercury also adversely affects wildlife. Eagles, osprey, common loons, river otters, and other fish-eating animals may suffer premature death, weight loss, difficulties reproducing, and other problems as a result of eating mercury-contaminated fish.

Most of the mercury released to the atmosphere comes from the burning of mercury-containing garbage and the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas to provide energy. Mercury may also become airborne or released in wastewater when mercury-containing products are improperly handled. By reducing the amount of mercury that is used and improving the management and disposal practices for mercury-containing products, less mercury will be released to the environment.

These Items Often Have Added Mercury

- Fluorescent Lamps,
- Thermostats,
- Thermometers,
- Pressure Gauges (barometers, hydrometers, hygrometers, vacuum gauges, etc.),
- Switches (used in products such as appliances, vehicles, sump and bilge pumps),
- Flame Sensors or Temperature Probes (used in products such as gas appliances and ovens), and
- Button Cell Batteries.

Disposal of Mercury-Added Products

As of January 1, 2008, the State of New Hampshire has banned the disposal of mercury-added products in solid waste landfills, transfer stations, or incinerators, regardless of the amount of (intentionally-added) mercury in the product.

When products containing mercury are placed in the trash, the mercury doesn't disappear - it finds its way into the environment. That's why mercury-containing products cannot be disposed of with regular trash or poured down the drain. Mercury products and compounds must be recycled or managed as a hazardous waste.

Households have a low to no-cost method to properly handle mercury products at the end of their useful life - Towns hold hazardous waste collection events every year.

Additional Information

For more information regarding household hazardous waste, please contact hhw@des.nh.gov, call (603) 271-2047, or go to <http://des.nh.gov/>.