

FACT SHEET: Mercury Spills

Mercury is a natural substance that can be found in the environment. At room temperature, metallic mercury is a shiny, silver liquid that can evaporate into a colorless, odorless vapor. Mercury is harmful to both humans and wildlife and is found in many different products. When mercury is contained in thermometers there is very little chance of exposure. If the item breaks, mercury can be released. The small amount of mercury from a broken “fever” thermometer is unlikely to cause health problems if the spill is promptly, safely, and properly cleaned up.



Can I clean up a small spill in my own home?

You can probably clean up a small spill by yourself if the following is true:

- The spill is a small amount, less than or equal to one household thermometer.
- The spill is limited to a small area and mercury has not been spread around.
- The spill is on a hard surface like tile, linoleum or wood that is in good condition.
- The spill is on a small porous item like an area rug, a blanket or clothing that can be safely and appropriately disposed of as indicated below for mercury debris.

If the spill involves a large area, has been spread around, is in cracks and crevices or other difficult to clean places, or is on non-disposable porous item such as wall to wall carpeting or upholstery, follow steps  to  below then contact the emergency spill program at - **800-641-5005**

For information on broken fluorescent lamps visit www.mercvt.org or call **-855-63-CYCLE** (toll-free in VT). During non-work hours, contact the Northern New England Poison Center at **-800- 222-1222**

How can I clean up a small spill in my home?

-  **1.** Open windows to ventilate the area. Close off the room from other rooms in your house. Shut the door and close any air pathways (like floor or ceiling grates, air conditioning or heating vents) which will circulate mercury vapors into other areas of the house.
-  **2.** Keep pets, children (especially infants and young children) and pregnant women out of the room. Isolate the area - Do not walk on the mercury or track it into other areas of the house.
-  **3.** Wear disposable gloves if at all possible.
-  **4.** Use stiff cardboard (such as playing cards or index cards) to push mercury droplets together and to scoop up beads of mercury; a flashlight will reflect off of shiny mercury beads and make them easier to see.
-  **5.** Use the sticky side of duct or masking tape to pick up any remaining mercury beads.
- 6.** Place the mercury-contaminated cleanup materials (cardboard, gloves, tape, etc.) into double plastic bags or preferably a glass or rigid container with a lid for containment. In the meantime, store the bag or container (label and separate from your regular trash) - outside the house in an area inaccessible to children. Contact your local solid waste district, alliance or municipality for proper disposal of spill cleanup debris. See www.mercvt.org “proper disposal” or call toll free **-855-63-CYCLE** or **(802) 522-5736**.
- 7.** Wash your hands or shower if you came in contact with the mercury.
- 8.** For health questions, call **-800-439-8550** (toll-free in VT) and dial zero to speak with an operator. During non- work hours, contact the Northern New England Poison Center at **-800-222-1222**
- 9.** Once cleaned up, weather permitting, leave windows in the contaminated room open as long as practical.



NEVER

-  Ignore or sweep up the spill.
-  Use a vacuum to clean up the spill.
-  Pour mercury down the sink.
-  Wash mercury-containing items in a washing machine.
-  Throw mercury in the trash.