



# REDUCING MERCURY POLLUTION

A WASHINGTON TOXICS COALITION FACT SHEET · AUGUST 2006 · PAGE 1

## Five Things You Can Do To Reduce Mercury Pollution and Protect Your Health

### 1. Dispose of mercury products safely.

It is quite possible that you have a number of products in your home that contain mercury. The most likely objects are thermometers and thermostats.

Energy efficient compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs) also contain mercury.

Mercury-containing products can break and you can be exposed to unhealthy levels of mercury in your home. If you do have a mercury spill, you should immediately ventilate the room and close the room off to the rest of the house as well as you can. Pick up the mercury with an eyedropper or a piece of heavy paper. Place the mercury, as well as the instrument that is broken into a plastic bag, then triple bag it to prevent leakage. Take the bag to the nearest household hazardous waste site. No matter what, DO NOT use an ordinary vacuum to clean up the mercury spill. This will significantly increase the likelihood of human exposure.

In addition, the disposal of mercury products can cause pollution problems. If products containing mercury are simply thrown out in the trash, they eventually will reach a landfill or incinerator, where they can pollute our air and water. Rather than

throwing out your mercury products, take them to your local household hazardous waste site. Each city or county has different hours and rules for collecting mercury, so contact your local household hazardous waste site to determine the best way to dispose of mercury products in your area.



Photo courtesy of People for Puget Sound

*Central Puget Sound is one of ten waterways in Washington that exceed water quality standards for mercury. Others include Commencement Bay and the Snohomish River.*

To locate the household hazardous waste disposal site nearest you:

- ❖ First, go to this website: <http://1800recycle.wa.gov/>.
- ❖ Second, mouse click on **1-800-RECYCLE Online** at the top of the website.
- ❖ Third, select the **county** in which you live, and then select the recyclable waste type **Household Hazardous Waste**.
- ❖ Fourth, scroll down the list of hazardous waste disposal facilities, looking for the sites that list **mercury** (meaning they are set up to handle mercury).

## 2. Shop responsibly.

As a consumer, you have the ability to make decisions about whether or not to buy products that contain mercury. Many common consumer products, including thermometers, thermostats, and novelty items such as clothes and toys, are available with mercury and without mercury. Fortunately, non-mercury alternatives are cost-effective and readily available. When shopping, choose the non-mercury options. For thermometers and thermostats, most pharmacies and hardware stores carry non-mercury, digital versions.

## 3. Avoid certain fish that have high levels of mercury.

Eating fish is a very healthy part of anybody's diet. Sadly, many species of fish have been contaminated with high levels of mercury, making it important to make sure that the fish that you eat does not contain unsafe levels of mercury. This is particularly true for pregnant women and young children because they are most susceptible to the impacts of mercury.

Washington State has issued warnings about eating fish from Lake Whatcom, Lake Roosevelt, Sinclair Inlet, and Eagle Harbor. The Washington Department of Health has issued a fish-consumption advisory warning women of childbearing age and children under six not to eat any shark, swordfish, tilefish, king mackerel, or tuna steaks, and also to limit consumption of canned tuna because of high mercury concentrations. The departments of Health and Ecology are working together to test additional water bodies to determine if other Washington waters are contaminated with mercury at levels that could harm human health.

For updated information, visit the Department of Health website at [www.doh.wa.gov/fish](http://www.doh.wa.gov/fish) or call 877-485-7316.

## 4. Write the Washington State Department of Ecology in support of policies that will reduce mercury pollution.

The Washington State Department of Ecology is currently developing regulations to better regulate mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants. In 2004, Washington's only coal plant, TransAlta, reported releasing a total of 452 pounds of mercury.

Please contact the Department of Ecology and ask them to protect public health and the environment from mercury pollution by adopting stringent regulations for coal-fired power plants. Send your comments to Elena Guilfoil, [egui461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:egui461@ecy.wa.gov).

## 5. Join the Washington Toxics Coalition's Action Alert List.

Washington Toxics Coalition has an action alert list for people who want to be updated about mercury and other toxic pollution issues and what you can do. Join the list by sending an e-mail to [volunteer@watoxics.org](mailto:volunteer@watoxics.org) or visit our website at [www.watoxics.org](http://www.watoxics.org).