

# Keep Your Home and Workplace Mercury Free

While mercury has been phased out of most household products, mercury containing devices can still be found in homes and offices and can sometimes be found for sale at garage sales, antique shops, and flea markets. It is best to replace these items in your home and avoid purchasing older items that still contain mercury. Certain items, like mercury containing thermometers and thermostats, are even banned from sale in Michigan.

## Mercury Exposure

Mercury is a natural element and exists in different forms. The type of mercury found in old thermometers and similar devices, is known as elemental or metallic mercury. Metallic mercury is a silver liquid that slowly evaporates at room temperature. The odorless, invisible gas is highly toxic when inhaled and can cause nerve damage. Symptoms of mercury exposure include headaches, tremors, muscle weakness, and mental disturbance. Higher exposures can cause more serious health effects, including respiratory failure and death.

## Mercury Spills

When spilled, mercury breaks up into small droplets, making it hard to clean up and easier to evaporate. Spilled mercury can linger for a long time if not properly cleaned up, creating an ongoing exposure to the toxic gas. Cleaning up a mercury spill must be done right for everyone's safety.

**Never use a vacuum to clean up a mercury spill.** For additional information on responding to mercury spills, see Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Web page at [Michigan.gov/Mercury](https://Michigan.gov/Mercury). Some spills require evacuation and professional clean-up.

**Call the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Response Center at 800-424-8802** for a spill that requires more help than what the DHHS Toxic Hotline (1-800-648-6942) or the local health department can provide.



*Antique thermometers containing mercury*

## Household Items that Commonly Contain Mercury

- Antique clocks with pendulums
- Barometers
- Thermostats
- Thermometers
- Fluorescent light bulbs



## How to Safely Get Rid of Mercury

1. Mercury containing devices found in households should be taken to a local household hazardous waste collection site. Never put these items in the trash or pour mercury down a drain.
2. Find a household hazardous waste collection site at [Michigan.gov/EGLEHHW](https://Michigan.gov/EGLEHHW).
3. Before heading off to a recycling site with an item that contains mercury, carefully package the item to prevent breakage.
4. Minimize movement and handling of the item.
5. Place the item in a clear plastic zip lock bag to protect the item from breaking, keep it contained, and allow the collection operator to verify the item is intact and/or the mercury is contained.
6. Place the wrapped item in a rigid container with a tight-fitting lid, such as a coffee can.
7. Label the container (i.e., mercury thermometer, mercury thermostat, etc.).

Businesses needing help with handling mercury containing items should contact their waste management vendor or contact EGLE's Environmental Assistance Center at 800-662-9278 or [EGLE-Assist@Michigan.gov](mailto:EGLE-Assist@Michigan.gov).

## Learn More

Check out the following resources to learn more about mercury:

- Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS): [Michigan.gov/Mercury](https://Michigan.gov/Mercury).
- Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE): [Michigan.gov/EGLEMercury](https://Michigan.gov/EGLEMercury).
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): [EPA.gov/Mercury](https://EPA.gov/Mercury).