

Mercury Elimination Program

Mercury has been targeted as one of the top Persistent Bio-Accumulative Toxic chemicals to be reduced on a global level. Exposure to Mercury has been associated with impaired neurological development in children, kidney disease, and may result in damage to the gastrointestinal tract and the nervous system. At higher doses, mercury can be responsible for respiratory failure and even death.

The Department of Occupational Safety and Environmental Health (OSEH), and Procurement Services spearheaded a Mercury Elimination Program in 2001. In 2002, the State of Michigan banned the sale of most mercury containing thermometers. Before the elimination program was implemented, emergency response was costing the university approximately \$20,000 annually cleaning up broken mercury containing devices in research and teaching laboratories on campus. Though the mercury from these spills was contained and not released into the environment, cleanup efforts were costly and laboratories were often shut down during cleanup, halting research activity.

Devices that contain mercury include thermometers, barometers, manometers, some thermostats, and miscellaneous medical equipment. Mercury containing devices are still being found across campus, and some laboratories have not replaced all of their thermometers. The cost of replacement may be an issue but how do you measure the cost of lost research time when a laboratory is shut down for an emergency response? To aid in the cost control, Fisher Scientific has provided The Office of Campus Sustainability (OCS) with mercury-free thermometers which can be distributed to campus laboratories at no charge, and Procurement Services has negotiated special pricing on additional types of mercury-free thermometers.



If you discover any mercury containing devices, please contact EHS Hazardous Materials Management at 763-4568 to schedule a waste collection

Since implementing the Mercury elimination program in 2001, EHS emergency responses due to broken thermometers have been reduced from 47 in 2001 to just 5 in 2016. During this time period, nearly 7,000 thermometers have been collected for recycling and more than 3,000 pounds of mercury-containing devices have been disposed of properly.

For more information or to request a mercury free thermometer at no cost, please contact sustainable-labs@umich.edu