



Minnesota  
Pollution  
Control  
Agency

# Collecting and managing household mercury thermometers

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**T**his fact sheet is for the many public and private entities that are interested in reducing the risk of mercury poisoning and releases by offering free collection of mercury-containing thermometers to households.

These collection efforts are important because mercury is a priority pollutant in Minnesota, and we should do whatever we can to minimize the possibility that the health of family members will not be endangered by a mercury spill in the home or that mercury will find its way via the waste stream into the environment. Mercury that finds its way into Minnesota's lakes and streams can end up contaminating fish, and the methylmercury in these fish can affect the health of the people who eat them.

Collection efforts over the past two years have resulted in the safe removal and proper management of thousands of thermometers and many pounds of mercury. These collection efforts supplement existing household hazardous waste (HHW) collection efforts and provide an excellent opportunity to educate the public on mercury issues. Partnerships with HHW programs are resulting in efficient and cost-effective management of this toxic material.

To promote the continued safe collection of household mercury thermometers, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) recognizes

the need to provide guidance and to minimize applicable regulations for collectors. MPCA staff worked with counties and local regulators to develop this policy and guidance for the safe collection, transportation and management of household mercury thermometers. The intent is that this policy and standard guidance will be utilized by both private and public entities statewide.

## Policy

The MPCA and counties will regulate collections of household thermometers in accordance with the following collection and transportation guidance. The MPCA does not require that thermometer-collection activities be reported to the MPCA. Thermometer collectors may comply with this policy and the attached guidance in place of the MPCA Special Waste Pilot Project and the HHW regulations (Minn. Rules Chapter 7045.0310). However, some counties may require compliance with additional local program regulations.

## Guidance for household mercury thermometer collections

### Notification

- Contact your local household hazardous waste program for assistance and coordination (go to [www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/hhw.html](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/hhw.html) to link to any of the HHW programs in Minnesota).

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- Some HHW programs will accept the household thermometers you collect and properly manage them for you.
- Failure to contact your county HHW representative before collection may result in thermometers not being accepted by the HHW program, thereby increasing disposal costs. HHW programs can provide brochures that contain information on proper management of other mercury-containing household devices. The brochures also include the locations of the nearest drop-off sites for HHW.

### **Setup**

- Obtain appropriate containers for storing the mercury thermometers. A container should be able to safely hold one pound of thermometers (approximately 300 thermometers).
- Review this guidance and MPCA Household Hazardous Waste fact sheet #4.43b, *Cleaning up spilled mercury in the home* (see [www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/hhw-mercuryspills.pdf](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/hhw-mercuryspills.pdf)), with employees who will assist with mercury collection and transportation.
- Establish the waste-management method for collected thermometers (via HHW facility, special waste recycler or hazardous waste disposal).
- Establish the transportation method for collected thermometers (self haul, contract transporter or HHW assisted) and review applicable requirements.

### **On-site collection**

- Store thermometers in leak-proof containers that can be tightly sealed.
- Mark the container with the words “mercury thermometers for recycling”
- Keep the container closed when not adding or removing waste.
- Store in a “low-traffic” area to prevent breakage of the container or its contents and regularly

check that the container is still in good condition and secure.

- Put leaking thermometers, mercury and cleanup materials into a double-lined container, such as a sealed plastic bag inside a sealable plastic container.
- Report releases of mercury to the environment to the Minnesota Duty Officer by calling (651) 649-5451 in the Twin Cities metro area or (800) 422-0798 from anywhere in Minnesota.

### **Mobile collection and transport**

- Work with local regulators to understand transportation requirements.
- To comply with U.S. Department of Transportation requirements, do not transport more than 300 thermometers per container.
- Transport containers in a secure way so that the thermometers do not break.
- Report releases to the environment to the Duty Officer at (651) 649-5451 or (800) 422-0798.

### **Waste thermometer management**

- When the on-site or mobile collection event is over or the container is filled, follow through with your transportation and waste-management plans.
- Celebrate your role in reducing mercury hazards in the home and the environment!

### **For more information**

If you have questions about this guidance and you are located in the Twin Cities metro area, contact your county environmental services department.

If you have questions about this guidance and you are located outside the Twin Cities metro area, call the MPCA toll free at (800) 657-3843.