



Minnesota  
Pollution  
Control  
Agency

*This fact sheet discusses how to manage mercury switches from vehicles.*

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# Managing Mercury Switches

Hazardous Waste Fact Sheet #4.26 October 1998

## Environmental Concerns

Mercury, a highly toxic metal, is often found in hood or trunk light switches. Liquid mercury and mercury vapor are hazardous to both humans and the environment. Once released, mercury cannot be eliminated — it will stay in the environment forever. *The amount of mercury found in just one hood or trunk light has the potential to contaminate over 1000 northern pike.* Already, 94% of Minnesota lakes tested have mercury contamination at levels that limit human fish consumption. Removal and proper management of malfunctioning mercury switches or switches in vehicles destined for salvage is an important part of keeping mercury out of the environment.

## Management

Mercury is found in a small glass or metal capsule within the light switches. These types of switches were commonly used in trunk and hood lights in the 1970s and 1980s. Some new cars still use them.



Be careful when handling trunk and hood switches to keep the small glass or metal capsules that hold the liquid mercury from breaking and releasing mercury into the environment.

These light switches have been found in vehicles built in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as brand-new cars. To be safe, remove all light switches from vehicles before crushing.



**When removing light switches, be careful not to break or puncture the mercury capsule.** Store the switches in a leak-proof, closed container in a manner that will prevent the capsule from breaking. Mark the container “*Mercury Switches for Recycling.*” Choose a container based on the number of switches you remove. (Collision and repair shops may remove few switches compared to salvage companies.) Inspect the container regularly to ensure that it is not leaking; recontainerize switches when leaking or broken containers are discovered. You are not required to document inspections.

Mercury switches are regulated as a special waste. Businesses may accumulate 500 kilograms (about 1100 pounds) as long as the waste is shipped within 180 days after that limit is reached.

Recycle mercury switches by sending them or taking them to a licensed metals recycler that reclaims mercury. (See list on page 2.) If your businesses is a very small quantity generator (VSQG)\*, you can also take mercury switches to a VSQG Collection site that accepts this waste.





For a list of collection sites, see Hazardous Waste fact sheet # 2.51, *VSQG Collection Program Requirements for Generators*.

\*VSQG means very small quantity *hazardous waste* generator — a business that “generates” less than 220 pounds of hazardous waste (about half a 55-gallon drum of liquid) per month.

## Transportation Requirements

Generators may only ship to:

1. a consolidation site located in Minnesota,
2. a designated recycling, disposal or reclamation facility, or
3. a foreign destination.

**When shipping within Minnesota**, you may transport using your business or personal vehicle as long as the shipment/load is secure. Use a waste-tracking invoice containing the following information:

- name and address of your business;
- a contact person at your business;
- the name and address of the facility to which you are shipping;
- the date shipment is initiated;
- a description of the waste shipped; and
- the quantity or amount of waste shipped.

A hazardous waste manifest and a licensed hazardous waste transporter are not required for shipments to a recycler or collection site within Minnesota.

**If you are shipping to a recycling or reclamation facility outside of Minnesota**, you may use a waste-tracking invoice as outlined above, provided the waste does not pass through a state requiring a manifest. If you are shipping to a disposal facility or the waste will pass through a state requiring a manifest, you must use a hazardous waste manifest and a licensed hazardous waste transporter.

When shipping to a foreign destination, the generator must comply with all requirements applicable to hazardous waste exports.

Keep copies on site of waste-tracking invoices, manifests and export documents for at least 3 years from the date of shipment.

## For More Information

Your metropolitan county and the MPCA have staff available to answer your questions about hazardous waste management in Minnesota. For more specific information, contact your hazardous waste assistance provider listed below.

### Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Toll free ..... (800) 657-3864  
Brainerd ..... (218) 828-2492  
Detroit Lakes ..... (218) 847-1519  
Duluth ..... (218) 723-4660  
Marshall ..... (507) 537-7146  
Rochester ..... (507) 285-7343  
St. Paul ..... (651) 297-8363

**MPCA Web Address:** [<http://www.pca.state.mn.us>]

### Metro County Hazardous Waste Offices

Anoka County ..... (612) 421-7094  
Carver County ..... (612) 361-1800  
Dakota County ..... (612) 891-7011  
Hennepin County ..... (612) 348-8100  
Ramsey County ..... (651) 773-4466  
Scott County ..... (612) 496-8177  
Washington County ..... (651) 430-6655

## Service Providers

The following companies have indicated they accept mercury switches. This is not a complete list of available services. Providing this information is a service only; it is not to be construed as an endorsement nor certification that these companies are in compliance with applicable laws. The MPCA recommends that generators evaluate the services and compliance status of any company they use to manage waste.

### Mercury Waste Solutions

21211 Durand Ave.  
Union Grove, WI 53182  
(414) 878-2599  
(800) 741-3343

### Recyclights, Inc.

401 West 86th Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55420-2707  
(612) 948-0626  
(800) 831-2852

### Mercury Waste Solutions

1218 Central Avenue  
Albany, NY 12205  
(518) 459-0820

## Record Keeping