

Selling mercury items

Liquid mercury, thermometers, barometers, thermostats, switches, sphygmomanometers, fishing lures, plumb bobs, and other items

Mercury is a toxic element that was historically used in many household and commercial items due to its unique properties and is now being phased out of most uses. The offer, sale, or transfer of liquid mercury and items containing liquid mercury is regulated in Minnesota by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

Anyone offering an item that contains liquid mercury for sale or donation in Minnesota is subject to these requirements, whether a private citizen, collector, non-profit organization, or business. Offers and sales through any method are regulated, whether in a store or shop, classified advertisement, flea market, or online. If a mercury item is located in Minnesota, it is regulated, regardless of where a potential purchaser is located.

How can I tell if an item contains liquid mercury and whether I can sell it?

[Table 1](#) on the next page lists common household and commercial items containing liquid mercury, how to identify them, and the Minnesota requirements. Check [Table 1](#) first to ensure sale of an item is not prohibited.

If selling a mercury item is not prohibited, what conditions must I meet?

If [Table 1](#) does not list a mercury item as prohibited from sale, then to sell it to a buyer in Minnesota you must:

- Clearly label the item stating that it contains mercury, that the item may not be disposed into the trash, and that the mercury must be recycled or properly disposed.
- Provide the buyer with a safety data sheet (SDS) for the mercury in the item that complies with U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) requirements. Obtaining a compliant SDS is the responsibility of the seller; the MPCA does not provide SDSs.
- Obtain a signed statement from the buyer prior to completing the sale stating that the seller will only use the item for medical, dental, instructional, research, or manufacturing purpose.

Note: 'Collecting' or 'display' are not allowed uses for mercury item sales in Minnesota.

How can I properly dispose of mercury items instead of selling them?

Households may contact their local Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) program. Find your local HHW program at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/living-green/find-your-household-hazardous-waste-collection-site>.

Businesses may contact their local Very Small Quantity Generator (VSQG) program. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw2-51, VSQG collection programs, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw2-51.pdf>.

More information

Guidance and requirements in this fact sheet were compiled from Minn. Stat. ch. 116 and incorporate regulatory interpretation decisions made by the MPCA on August 11, 2020. Visit the Office of the Revisor of Statutes at <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/pubs> to review Minnesota Statutes.

Contact the MPCA with questions. Immediately report all mercury spills to the Minnesota Duty Officer.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Toll free (all offices) 1-800-657-3864
All offices 651-296-6300

..... <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

Minnesota Duty Officer

Toll free 1-800-422-0798
Metro 651-649-5451

Table 1. Common household and commercial mercury-containing items

Item	How to identify regulated mercury items	Common brand/product line names	Sale conditions
Life safety switches	Tip-over switches for propane heaters; ignition interrupters for personal watercraft; roll-over switches for outboard motors; airbag & anti-lock brakes switches for motor vehicles.	ATE; Hiland; Merycon; SeaDoo; Ubakata Industry	Sales allowed only as replacement parts for legacy products. Not subject to the conditions on page 1.
Thermometers	Vintage thermometers with silver or gray fluid. Red, blue, or black fluids are not mercury. New silver fluid thermometers labeled 'environmentally-safe' contain non-mercury galinstan.	Chaney; Crandall Pettee; Hillyer Ragsdale; JW Allen; Taylor (prior to 2003); Trerice (prior to 2003); Tycos	Sales are discouraged but allowed, subject to the conditions on page 1.
Liquid mercury	Extremely heavy, silvery liquid. Commonly in vintage photographic/darkroom collections.	May be labeled as Hg, Hydragryum, Quicksilver, or Mercuric. May be in bottles, flasks, jars, or vials.	Sales are discouraged but allowed, subject to the conditions on page 1.
Rotating electrical connectors or slip rings	Marketed as brushless or maintenance-free.	Mercotac, Moflon, Rotocon (Meridian Laboratory), SenRing	Sales are discouraged but allowed, subject to the conditions on page 1.
Thermostats	Mercury found in glass ampoules shaped like drug capsules. Digital and snap action thermostats do not contain mercury.	Chronotherm; Emerson; Honeywell; Lux; Trane; Weathertron; White Rodgers	All offer and sales prohibited. Re/installation also prohibited.
Barometers	Mercury found in clear glass tubes. Aneroid and digital barometers do not contain mercury.	Admiral Fitzroy barometers; Stick barometers	All offer and sales prohibited.
Clock pendulums	Clear glass cylinders partially filled with silver liquid.	Crystal regulator clocks, French regulator clocks	All offer and sales prohibited.
Contactors and relays	Also known as displacement contactors or displacement relays.	Durakool; Magnecraft; Mercury Displacement Industries; Permatrol, Struthers-Dunn; Watlow	All offer and sales prohibited.
Fishing lures	Clear center or nose section with visible mercury drops, or flattened nose section. Bottom may be stamped 'mercury'.	Neon Fire Fly; Neon Mickey; Mercoy; Mercury Minnow; Mercury Worm	All offer and sales prohibited.
Flame sensors	Long flexible metal tube attached to electrical component.	Emerson, White Rodgers	All offer and sales prohibited.
Float switches	Include bilge and plug-in sump float switches, sealed in plastic. Types labeled 'mechanical' do not contain mercury.	Dayton; Grainger; Magnetrol; SJE-Rhombus; Teel; SJE-Rhombus	All offer and sales prohibited.
Light switches	Toggle light switches advertised as silent or stamped 'TOP'. Dial and rocker light switches do not contain mercury.	Arrow Hart; Bryant; General Electric; Groen; Homart; Leviton, Philmore, Rodale; Sears; Sierra; Super Switch	All offer and sales prohibited.
Plumb bobs	Cylindrical plumb bob with removable screw top.	Brown & Sharp #790; Starrett #87	All offer and sales prohibited.
Pressure switches	Mercury found in glass ampoules.	Dwyer; Honeywell; Mercoid; Pressuretrol; Vaporstat	All offer and sales prohibited.
Sphygmomanometers (blood pressure monitors)	Vertical glass tube scales. Aneroid and digital monitors do not contain mercury.	Baumanometer; Erkameter; Lumiscope; Mercurial, MPC, Nelkin, Pymah; Tycos, Universal	All offer and sales prohibited.
Tilt switches	Small metal pillbox, capsule, or bullet-shaped. Commonly found in vintage vehicle hood & trunk 'convenience' lights.	Con-tac-tor. Excalibur, Omega	All offer and sales prohibited.
Wetted reed switches	Small metal box, capsule, or test tube-shaped, usually with attached electronic pin connectors.	Clare; Coto; Hamlin; Magnecraft; Midtex; Potter & Brumfield; SRCO; Struthers-Dunn	All offer and sales prohibited.
Wheel & shaft balancers	Disc with tubular ring around circumference. Types with steel balls or oil do not contain mercury.	Balance Masters	All offer and sales prohibited.

Fluorescent, neon, and high-intensity discharge (HID) lamps that contain mercury in gaseous form are regulated for sale in Minnesota under a different set of requirements. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw4-21, Selling Fluorescent Lamps, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw4-21.pdf>.

Cosmetics, disinfectants, and pharmaceuticals that contain mercury as an ingredient are also regulated for sale in Minnesota under another set of requirements. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw4-22, Selling mercury cosmetics and pharmaceuticals, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw4-22.pdf>.