

# Selling Mercury Items

Liquid mercury, thermometers, barometers, thermostats, switches, sphygmomanometers, fishing lures, wheel balancers, and pendulums

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 in or from 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 SDS's;
- Obtain a signed statement from the buyer prior to transfer that the item will only be used 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 must manage mercury items as universal wastes or fully regulated hazardous wastes. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw4-62, Universal Wastes, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw4-62.pdf>.

## More information

Guidance and requirements in this fact sheet were compiled from Minnesota Statutes, Ch. 116. 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<br><i>Note: Brand name or product line inclusion does not mean that a particular item contains mercury</i> | Sale conditions<br><i>Apply to mercury items only</i>  |
|--|--|--|--|
| Thermometers<br>(may be found on barometers and novelty items; and in hygrometers/psychrometers) | Silver or gray-colored indicator fluid.<br>Red, blue, or black indicator fluids are not mercury. New silver-colored fluid thermometers labeled as 'environmentally-safe' contain galinstan, a non-mercury fluid. | Chaney; Crandall Pettee; Hillyer Ragsdale; JW Allen; Taylor (prior to 2003); Trerice (prior to 2003); Tycos                                | Sales are discouraged but allowed, subject to the <a href="#">conditions</a> on page 1.          |
| Liquid mercury   | Extremely heavy, silvery liquid. Commonly in vintage photographic/darkroom collections.  | May be labeled as Hg, Hydragyrum, Quicksilver, or Mercuric.<br>May be in bottles, flasks, jars, or vials.                                  | Sales are discouraged but allowed, subject to the <a href="#">conditions</a> on page 1.          |
| Thermostats<br>(includes aquastats, airstats, boilerstats, & furnacstats)                        | Mercury found in glass ampoules shaped like drug capsules.<br>Digital thermostats and those with snap action or bellows-actuated switches do not contain mercury.  | Chronotherm; Emerson; Honeywell; Lux; Trane; Weathertron; White Rodgers  | All offer and sales prohibited.<br>Installing or reinstalling used thermostats, also prohibited. |
| Barometers   | Mercury found in clear glass tubes.<br>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.<br>Solid filling and solid cylinders do not contain mercury.  | French Regulator clocks  | All offer and sales prohibited.  |
| Contactors and Relays  | Also known as displacement contactors or displacement relays.  | Durakool; Magnecraft; Mercury Displacement Industries (MDI); Struthers-Dunn; Watlow  | All offer and sales prohibited.  |
| Fishing lures  | Clear plastic center or nose section with visible mercury drops, or flattened nose section stamped 'mercury' underneath.   | Neon Fire Fly; Neon Mickey; Mercoy; Mercury Minnow; Mercury Worm   | All offer and sales prohibited.  |
| Flame sensors  | Long flexible metal tube with rigid metal end attached to metal electrical component.  | Emerson, White Rodgers   | All offer and sales prohibited.  |
| Float switches   | Include plug-in sump float switches, sealed in plastic.<br>Types labeled 'mechanical' do not contain mercury.  | Dayton; Grainger; Magnetrol; SJE-Rhombus; Teel; SJE-Rhombus  | All offer and sales prohibited.  |
| Pressure switches<br>(includes vaporstats)   | Mercury found in glass ampoules.   | Dwyer; Honeywell; Mercoid; Pressuretrol  | All offer and sales prohibited.  |
| Silent switches & tilt switches  | Light, tilt, and tip-over switches advertised as silent.   | Arrow Hart; Bryant; General Electric; Groen; Homart; Philmore, Rodale; Sears; Sierra; Super Switch   | All offer and sales prohibited.  |
| Sphygmomanometers<br>(blood pressure monitors)   | Vertical glass tube scales.<br>Aneroid and digital monitors do not contain mercury.  | Baumanometer; Erkameter; Lumiscope; Pymah; Tycos   | 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.<br>Types with steel balls or oil do not contain mercury.  | Balance Masters  | All offer and sales prohibited.  |

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