



Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department
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www.lincoln.ne.gov Keyword: household



MERCURY IN THE HOME

Cleanup & Disposal

What is Mercury?

Mercury is a poisonous heavy metal and is contained in some of the products we use everyday. It can be found in your home, in health care facilities, and in schools. This fact sheet provides information about some products that contain mercury, how to safely dispose of them, and what to do if a mercury-containing product is spilled or broken in the home.

Health effects of mercury

Mercury exposure at high levels can harm the brain, heart, kidneys, lungs, and immune system of people of all ages. It has been demonstrated that high levels of methyl mercury in the bloodstream of unborn babies and young children may harm the developing nervous system, making the child less able to think and learn.

Where is mercury found?

Sources of mercury in the home include fluorescent light bulbs (both tubes and Compact Fluorescent Lamps CFLs), mercury thermometers, and mercury thermostats.

Fluorescent Lamps

- Long fluorescent tubes and Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs) contain mercury mixed with a powder. Breaking the bulbs creates mercury vapor, which is difficult to contain.
- Both the tubes and the CFLs are household hazardous waste. When bulbs burn out, they should be brought to a **Household Hazardous Waste Collection**.

Thermometers

- If you have a mercury thermometer, bring it to a **Household Hazardous Waste Collection**. Digital thermometers are a safe alternative. Thermometers with a red or blue liquid do NOT contain mercury.

Thermostats

- Mercury thermostats can be replaced with energy-saving programmable electronic thermostats. Used mercury thermostats should not be put in the trash, but taken to a **Household Hazardous Waste Collection** for proper disposal.

Cleanup for Broken Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs), mercury thermometers, and thermostats:

1. **DO NOT VACUUM** or use a broom! This will spread the mercury vapor and dust.
2. Open windows, turn off the fan on the furnace or air conditioner, and keep people and pets away until cleanup is complete. Wait for at least 15 minutes before beginning the cleanup.
3. Wearing rubber gloves, if available, remove the larger pieces and place them in a closed container such as a glass jar with a screw top lid (or, if necessary, in a plastic bag which can be sealed). Carefully scoop up the fragments and powder from a hard-surface floor with stiff paper or cardboard (such as index cards or playing cards).
4. Pat the area with the sticky side of duct tape or other tape to pick up fine particles. Wipe the area with damp paper towels or wet wipes. Put all cleanup materials into the glass container or the plastic bag. Place all clean-up materials in a second sealed plastic bag.
5. Label the container “mercury waste – broken lamp” and remove from your home.
6. Wash hands and face. Continuing ventilating the room for several hours.
7. After the cleaning is complete, replace furnace or air purification filters.
8. Bring the sealed bag or jar to a Household Hazardous Waste Collection.
9. When the break happens on carpeting, homeowners may consider removing throw rugs or the area of carpet where the breakage occurred as a precaution, particularly if the rug is in an area frequented by infants, small children or pregnant women.
10. You may want to consider avoiding CFL usage in areas where they could easily be broken. Be careful when storing used/spent lamps before recycling to avoid breakage.

For more information, call LLCHD (402-441-8021, M-F, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.) or contact the 24-hour Nebraska Mercury Hotline (402-326-0231 or 1-888-242-1100).

Mercury thermometers, mercury thermostats, fluorescent bulbs, CFLs, and containers of mercury-related waste should be brought to a
Household Hazardous Waste Collection for proper disposal.

Call 402-441-8021 for a HHW Collection schedule for Lincoln and Lancaster County.