

# NEWS RELEASE

## Proper Disposal of Common Mercury-bearing Devices

Did you know that some common household items contain mercury? Fluorescent tubes, compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs), old thermometers, thermostats, some types of batteries, and electrical switches such as those that seamlessly activate lights when you open the trunk of your car or the door of your chest freezer may each contain mercury in varying amounts.

These items pose no threat to human health when they are intact; the mercury is tightly sealed in glass, stainless steel, or hard plastic (never attempt to remove mercury from an item in your home!). But disposing of mercury-bearing products through landfilling, scrapping, or incineration can release the mercury into the environment, generating measurable increases in the incidence of mercury in our air, water, and soil. Mercury (Hg) is a potent toxin, which in very small amounts, can pollute air, water and soil, and poison wildlife. Human exposure to this substance can lead to developmental and reproductive problems, neurological damage, and even death. According to the Ministry of the Environment, one gram of mercury - roughly the amount contained in the average mercury-bearing thermometer or electrical switch - is enough to contaminate an 8-hectare (20-acre) lake.

Fortunately, you can safely dispose of many of these mercury-bearing items at one of the many Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection events held by Quinte Waste Solutions throughout the area year round (check [www.quinterecycling.org](http://www.quinterecycling.org)). Just like paint, pesticides and batteries, mercury-bearing items like thermometers, thermostats and fluorescent tubes and lamps are then managed in a safe, environmentally responsible manner. The fluorescent tubes and lamps, for example, are shipped to a recycling facility where the mercury is recovered for reuse and the glass and metal components are recycled, which ensures that none of the components end up in landfill.

Mercury-bearing "white goods" (appliances such as chest freezers and washing machines that contain mercury switches) are not accepted at HHW drop-off events. However, Quinte Waste Solutions is developing a mercury switch removal program, which would ensure that the mercury switches found in discarded white goods are removed at the landfill or other point of collection, prior to being shredded, smelted, and/or recycled.

Lastly, if a mercury spill should occur in your home (eg. broken thermometer), do not collect it with a vacuum or pour it down the drain. Instead, sweep the spill and the broken device into a sealable container or jar using stiff card or paper. Thoroughly wash your hands afterward, and ensure that the area where the spill occurred is well ventilated. Clearly label the container, and contact Quinte Waste Solutions at 613-394-6266 for further disposal instructions.

For more information about mercury go to <http://www.ec.gc.ca:80/MERCURY/EN/index.cfm>