

# Mercury-free Colorado

## Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

### Cleanup Guidance for Small Mercury Spills

**Applies to mercury spills of less than one tablespoon** - contact a professional spill remediation contractor with experience in mercury cleanup for larger spills. One tablespoon (15 ml) of mercury weighs about a half of a pound.

Mercury spills can be very hazardous and should be cleaned up as soon as possible. Mercury will vaporize slowly over time and can expose you and your employees to toxic fumes for a very long time if not thoroughly cleaned up.

#### General Instructions

**Evacuate the spill area.** Ensure that people's shoes, clothing and other items do not have any mercury on them before they are allowed to leave the area. Restrict entry to the area to only those necessary to clean up the spill.

**Isolate the spill area.** The affected room should be isolated from other rooms in the building by closing interior doors leading to other inside areas. Open exterior doors and windows for ventilation. Use fans to circulate the air in the spill area before, during and after cleanup.

**Turn off ventilation systems.** The heating and air conditioning system, and any other circulation systems that could circulate air from the spill area to other parts of the building, should be turned off. Mercury vaporizes at room temperature and is readily absorbed through the lungs. These vapors are odorless and colorless.

**Contain the spill.** Prevent the mercury from spreading onto sloping or porous surfaces. Do not allow mercury near drains, cracks or crevices.

**Determine if the spill must be reported.** Spills of mercury in quantities equal to or greater than the reportable quantity (RQ) of one pound must be reported to the National Response Center (1-800-424-8802) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (1-877-518-5608) immediately. In addition, a release of any quantity of mercury, which has or may enter waters of the State of Colorado (which include surface water, ground water and dry gullies or storm sewers leading to surface water) must be reported to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. To assemble a spill kit, you can assemble one using common items including:

- eye dropper or syringe without needle
- safety glasses or goggles
- rubber, latex or nitrile gloves
- small plastic container with lid (like a 35-mm film canister)
- slightly larger plastic container with lid
- flashlight
- index card or rubber squeegee
- small plastic dustpan
- adhesive tape
- ziptop plastic bags
- powdered zinc
- paper towels
- plastic bucket or tray
- strong plastic trash bags



**Gather up all visible mercury.** Use the index card or rubber squeegee to gather the mercury beads together. Start at the outer edges of the spill and push all of the material toward the center of the spill area. Scoop the mercury up using the index card or

**Turn on ventilation systems.** Once there appears to be no visible mercury on the carpet, turn the heating and air conditioning system and any other circulation systems back on, but keep the interior doors to this room closed. Exterior windows or doors should be left open for at least a few hours, 24 - 48 hours would be best.

### **Spills Down a Drain**

Since mercury is heavier than water, it will likely accumulate in the S-trap of a drain. The slow dissolution of the mercury in a sink trap can release mercury into the air and wastewater system for many years.

**Remove the sink trap.** Working over a tray or bucket, carefully remove the sink trap and pour the contents into the tray or bucket.

**Recover the mercury.** After allowing it to settle, gently remove as much water as possible without disturbing the mercury. Use an eyedropper to recover all of the mercury. Place the recovered mercury into the small plastic container and seal the lid.

**Seal the mercury waste container.** Place the small plastic container inside the larger plastic container to provide additional containment. Seal each lid securely so that the mercury and its vapors will be contained. Place the sealed containers into a ziptop plastic bag and seal. Label the outer bag "Hazardous Waste - Mercury."

**Reassemble the sink trap.** Replace the sink trap and dispose of the remaining water.

**Turn on ventilation systems.** Turn the heating and air conditioning system and any other circulation systems back on, but keep the interior doors to this room closed. Exterior windows or doors should be left open for at least a few hours, 24 - 48 hours would be best.

*Visit the Mercury-free Colorado website at <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/hm/mercury/>*

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment  
4300 Cherry Creek Drive South  
Denver, Co 80246-1530  
Email: [cdphe.hmmercury@state.co.us](mailto:cdphe.hmmercury@state.co.us)