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Mercury Pollution Prevention

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CHARLOTTE, Mich. — Remember that strange, silvery liquid within broken thermometers? Interesting and intriguing, had we known then what we know now, we would report the spill immediately.

The State of Michigan has a multitude of public acts regarding mercury. Everything from phasing out mercury in schools, to mercury thermometer bans to mercury-containing medical equipment sales bans. With that much attention, one would think the problem has been taken care of and no longer do we need to worry. Not so.

Mercury is liquid at ordinary temperatures. At room temperature it can evaporate to become an invisible, odorless highly toxic vapor. Inhalation of mercury vapor can lead to permanent damage to the brain and to the central nervous system.

In the United States one-in-six children born every year have been exposed to mercury levels so high that they are potentially at risk for learning disabilities, motor skill impairment and short-term memory loss.

Improper clean-up is risky. While most visible mercury beads might have been removed, there is still the very real risk of accidental inhalation from mercury vapor. Never use a vacuum cleaner or broom to clean up a mercury spill and never pour mercury down the drain or wash mercury-contaminated items in a washing machine. Any of these actions can cause contamination to spread to areas greater than necessary. Contact the National Poison Control Center for information on spill clean-up, (800)222-1222.

Safely dispose of old mercury thermometers by participating in the Eaton County Department of Resource Recovery "Mercury Thermometer Exchange Program". Simply bring your old mercury thermometers in zip-loc freezer baggies to any of the following locations: Delta Township Clerk's office, Barry-Eaton District Health Department, Bellevue Village Hall, Charlotte Area Recycling Authority, Eaton Rapids City Hall, Grand Ledge City Hall, Olivet City Hall, Sunfield Township Recycling Center or the Eaton County Department of Resource Recovery. In exchange, you will receive a free digital thermometer. One per household, please.

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The Michigan Department of Community Health has many more resources available at www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,1607,7-132-2945_5105_47868---.00.html. Included is a list of contractors who clean up mercury spills.

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