

Mercury Disposal Ban To Take Effect January 1, 2005

While it has been illegal for businesses to disposal of mercury and mercury containing products since the mid-80's, Title 38 §1663, a new law now taking effect on January 1, bans the disposal of certain mercury containing products by Maine residents as well. Many towns have established collection points for these products at their transfer stations or public works garages so residents should check with their town office or solid waste facility to find out how to deliver these products.

Mercury is a neurotoxin that slows fetal and child development and impairs brain function. High exposure to mercury can cause tremors, numbness of the fingers and toes and memory loss. Mercury is the only metal that is a liquid at room temperature. When mercury is heated, it becomes a vapor and enters the atmosphere, later being returned to the ground and water bodies with precipitation. Mercury enters the food chain primarily through fish; all of Maine's lakes and streams have fish consumption advisories to protect the health of residents.

The following are the products covered by the disposal ban:

- A. A mercury containing thermostat or thermometer
- B. A mercury containing switch or other device, individually or as part of another product, used to measure, control or regulate gas, other fluids or electricity
- C. A mercury containing medical or scientific instrument
- D. A mercury containing electric relay or other electrical device;
- E. A mercury containing lamp

Several years ago, the Legislature banned the sale of mercury containing thermometers, except when prescribed by a physician. Mercury is a silver liquid and mercury thermometers are thin glass devices with a silver liquid. Mercury containing lamps include all types of fluorescent lamps, including compact, circular, U-tube and straight lamps. Most relays and switches do not contain mercury; if you have a question as to whether they must be recycled, ask at your solid waste facility.

For more information regarding the disposal ban, contact Carol Fuller or Ferg Lea at AVCOG or check the following web sites:

www.recyclemaine.com;
www.maine.gov/dep/mercury.