

Washington

Quicksilver Review

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Mercury Action Plan Under Way

The Department of Ecology and the Department of Health have begun work on a mercury action plan. For Ecology, this is the first chemical action plan to be produced as part of the Persistent, Bioaccumulative Toxin (PBT) Strategy.

Why mercury? Based on a comprehensive review of Ecology data sources, mercury is the most prevalent PBT in Washington. Mercury is extremely toxic and poses a serious environmental health concern. According to the federal Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) one in ten women have mercury levels within one tenth of potentially hazardous levels. This indicates a narrow margin of safety for some women, and supports efforts to reduce methylmercury exposure.* States across the country have initiated efforts to reduce the use and release of mercury; Washington will be able to learn from their experience. Finally, cost-effective alternatives exist for nearly all uses of mercury.

Over the next few months, Ecology and Health staff will identify places where mercury is used in Washington, sources of mercury releases, and potential areas for mercury-reduction actions. Staff will also identify existing laws, regulations, and incentives for reducing mercury use, con-

trolling releases, and encouraging cleanup. Using this information, staff will explore additional possible steps to reduce mercury and make recommendations for further action.

For more information, contact Cheri Peele at Ecology at 360-407-7203 or chep461@ecy.wa.gov.

Dairy Mercury Manometer Collection

The Washington State Department of Agriculture, the Washington State University Cooperative Extension, and the Department of Ecology are conducting the second phase of a project to help dairy farmers replace mercury manometers with mercury-free digital alternatives. A dairy mercury manometer is a vacuum gauge used to monitor pressure changes in the milking system.

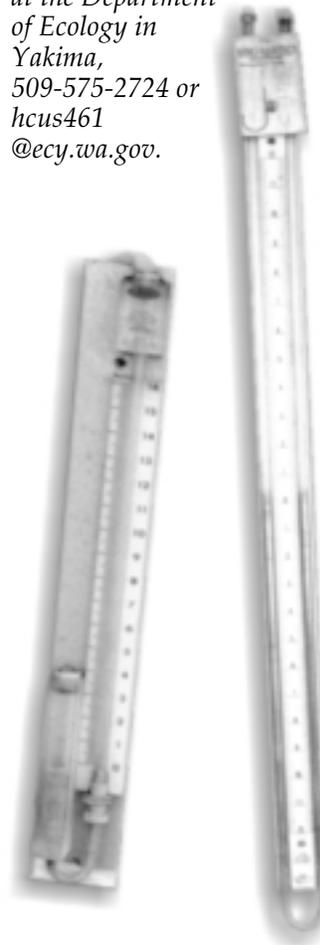
The statewide project began in September 2000, offering dairy farmers free collection of their mercury manometers and a \$300 rebate on a digital replacement. Due to limited funding, collections were conducted on a first-come, first-served basis. During the first phase of the project, 82 manometers were replaced, and seven mercury manometers no longer in use were removed at no charge to the farmer. As a result, 56 pounds of elemental mercury were

removed and disposed of as hazardous waste.

With additional farmers on a waiting list, project coordinators received supplemental funding to replace 21 manometers during the spring of 2002. As part of the second phase, the project also will conduct a survey to identify how many mercury manometers remain on farms and, where possible, collect old manometers no longer in use.

This project was funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, with matching goods and services by participating state agencies.

For more information, contact Holly Cushman at the Department of Ecology in Yakima, 509-575-2724 or hcus461@ecy.wa.gov.



New Newsletter

The Washington State Departments of Ecology and Health have created this newsletter to communicate about efforts to reduce the use and release of mercury in Washington. In addition to reporting on state activities, each issue will highlight a local program.

The *Quicksilver Review* will be published electronically every other month, posted on the Internet.

We will notify subscribers by e-mail when each new edition is published. To sign up for the notification, please register at: <http://listserv.wa.gov/archives/mercury-news.html>.

For more information, contact Cheri Peele at Ecology at 360-407-7203 or chep461@ecy.wa.gov.

* This paragraph has been corrected since its first publication.

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Mercury in Fish: Targeted Outreach to Vulnerable Populations

During the spring of 2001, the state Department of Health (DOH) issued a fish-consumption advisory for women of childbearing age and children under age six due to high levels of mercury. The advisory states that these groups should avoid eating shark, swordfish, tilefish, king mackerel, or tuna steak. It also recommends limiting the amount of canned tuna consumed, depending on a person's weight. For example, a 135-pound woman should eat no more than a can (6 ounces) of tuna per week. Specific weekly limits of canned tuna for children range from one ounce for a child who weighs about 20 pounds to three ounces for a child who weighs about 60 pounds.

Too much mercury is not healthy for anyone, but children are particularly impacted. If exposed during fetal development or early childhood, mercury

can cause central nervous system changes that affect a child's ability to learn. Since issuing the advisory, DOH staff has worked with representatives from populations of special concern to develop health messages and activities within their communities. DOH issued a news release and developed a question-and-answer fact sheet and a "fish facts" web site (www.doh.wa.gov/fish). In addition, DOH worked with the Washington State Public Health Association, local health departments, community and migrant health centers, and nutritionists from the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program.

Native Americans and Asian and Pacific Islanders in Washington may be at increased risk for mercury exposure, because they rely on fish as a key source of dietary protein. To address

the potential for increased mercury exposure among these populations, DOH has focused action to communicate the advisory within these communities. These actions include presentations before the American Indian Health Commission, consultation with the Governor's Councils on Native American and Asian Pacific American Affairs, and discussion with several other key organizations and individuals from these communities.

From these discussions DOH has learned that, while communicating fish advisories is important, efforts to reduce mercury in fish are crucial for effective public-health protection.

For more information, contact Joanne Prado at the Department of Health at 360-236-3172 or joanne.prado@doh.wa.gov



Local Focus: Spokane Mercury Thermometer Exchange

In an effort to keep personal and outdoor thermometers that contain mercury out of the trash, the Spokane Regional Solid Waste System and Wheelabrator Spokane Inc. are sponsoring a thermometer exchange program.

The mercury thermometers received will be properly disposed of as hazardous waste. Spokane County residents will be able to swap up to three thermometers per household for digital replacements. The swap began on March 18, 2002. New thermometers will be available as long as supplies last. Mercury thermometers can be swapped at any of the System's three facilities in the greater Spokane area, between 7 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., seven days a week.

For more information, contact the Spokane Regional Solid Waste System at 509-625-6580.