



Focus on Quicksilver Champions

from Ecology's Hazardous Waste and Toxics Reduction Program

Reducing toxic threats is one of the Department of Ecology's (Ecology) five strategic priorities. Between 2001 and 2007, statewide mercury reduction efforts prevented approximately 12,000 pounds of mercury from being released to the environment. This work was done through the state's Mercury Chemical Action Plan, which addresses the elimination, phase-out, collection, and recycling of certain mercury-containing products.

Ecology is working in partnership with the state Department of Health, local governments, public health agencies and trade associations to reduce and eliminate chemicals that pose significant health threats to our residents and our environment.

Meet the Quicksilver Champions

AAA Washington

AAA Washington was the first organization in the state to voluntarily remove auto switches containing mercury. AAA Washington worked in partnership with their more than 300 Approved Auto Repair facilities through the "Great Battery Roundup and Mercury Switch Out" for members and non-members throughout the year.

Automotive Recyclers of Washington

Auto recyclers in Washington state have collected more than 100 pounds of mercury since 2006. More than ninety percent of the auto recyclers in Washington are participating in the auto mercury switch removal program. Over 52,000 mercury-containing switches have been safely collected and disposed of from cars. The voluntary program is a partnership among the Automotive Recyclers of Washington Association (AROW), the Department of Ecology and the End of Life Vehicles Solutions Corporation. Washington's auto recyclers are leaders in removing mercury switches, ranking 5th in the nation.

Spokane Regional Solid Waste System

Beginning in 1991, with the opening of the waste-to-energy plant, the city of Spokane has aggressively gone after mercury sources, including working with local schools and supporting a full time Household Hazardous Waste collection program. This partnership collected over 300 pounds of mercury in 2006, the largest collection in the state.

Gail Savina

Gail Savina, retired from King County, is being recognized for her individual leadership to reduce mercury sources. Gail's enthusiasm, tenacity, and innovation helped prevent the release of mercury into the environment and provided leadership and guidance to those working to solve mercury challenges.

Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County

The Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County worked with dentists to help them meet mercury discharge limits in King County, established the “Take it Back Network” for electronic waste and fluorescent lamps in a regional partnership (King County, the City of Seattle, and Snohomish County solid waste agencies, the LHWMP, and recyclers, retailers and haulers). The network provided options for collecting burned-out fluorescent bulbs and tubes and in 2007 collected over 40,000 fluorescent lamps from small businesses and residents. In addition, the program is working with local contractors and distributors to collect and recycle mercury-containing thermostats to increase the number recycled.

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction is being recognized for the “Rehab the Lab” program to help keep kids safe through K-12 school lab cleanup programs. In many schools, a quiet danger sits tucked away in science departments, including bulk mercury in containers. Using a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the agency collected 800 pounds of mercury the first year and has collected a total of 2,600 pounds to date. The project trained teachers on how to store and dispose of chemicals safely and helped create a virtually mercury-free environment for school children throughout Washington state.

Representative Sam Hunt

Representative Sam Hunt relentlessly championed the creation and passing of the Mercury Education and Reduction Act of 2003. This law helped set the framework for the 12,000 pounds of mercury reductions being celebrated on Earth Day 2008. This legislation demonstrated Washington’s continued environmental leadership and commitment to eliminate and reduce mercury sources by 2015.

Small Scale Miner Community

In the past, mercury was used in dredging and prospecting activities to collect small particles of gold from streams. Today’s small-scale miners are actively collecting mercury left from these historical activities. Over the past five years, the miners have turned in more than 161 pounds of mercury through their voluntary effort. This is a great example of how volunteers from around the state are doing their part to take care of Washington.

Walla Walla County Public Works Department

In 2007, Walla Walla County committed to collecting mercury from community colleges and residences. In their first effort, Walla Walla County staff collected more than 300 pounds of mercury. Providing local solutions for mercury collection is a significant accomplishment for rural Washington.

Washington Air Conditioning Contractors of America

Through a partnership with the Thermostat Recycling Corporation, a national recycling program, the Washington Air Conditioning Contractors of America work locally with contractors to collect old thermostats for recycling from homes and businesses. Through this convenient program, Washington collected over 1,700 thermostats representing 85 pounds of mercury.

Washington Dental Association

The Washington State Dental Association and Ecology implemented mercury reduction programs that protect the public, but do not increase the cost to patients. The Dental Association and Ecology worked out an agreement in 2005 to reduce mercury from dental offices and clinics. This effort has prevented about 300 pounds of mercury from entering the environment each year.

Washington Retail Association

Ecology is recognizing the Washington Retail Association for helping to educate retailers and consumers to comply with the sales ban on certain mercury-containing products, including thermometers and thermostats. Through an aggressive outreach and communications plan, Ecology and the Washington Retail Association helped educate retailers about the product bans and exemptions required under the law. As a result, Ecology found a high level of compliance with the law that was due, in part, to the Retail Association's efforts to educate its members and manufacturers.

Washington State Hospital Association

In late 2005, the Washington State Hospital Association and Ecology signed an agreement to work in partnership with almost 100 hospitals across the state on mercury reduction and technical assistance programs.

Through this partnership, the number of member hospitals that have completely eliminated the use of mercury-containing thermometers rose from 68 percent in 2006 to 86 percent in 2007. In addition, the number of hospitals adopting mercury-free purchasing policies increased from 38 percent in 2006 to 71 percent in 2007.

Washington Toxics Coalition

Over the past five years, the Washington Toxics Coalition has monitored the work of the Mercury Education and Recovery Act and conducted outreach campaigns to help educate the public on mercury reduction and toxics issues. They have produced educational fact sheets, conducted workshops, and supported consumer educational efforts related to mercury, especially reaching out to children and pregnant mothers.

If you need this information in an alternate format, please call the Hazardous Waste and Toxics Reduction Program at 360-407-6700. Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.