If mercury is so toxic, why is it still used in some products?

- It's a very useful metal.
- It's extremely malleable.
- It conducts electricity well.
- It's highly resistant to corrosion.
- It expands and contracts uniformly with temperature.
- It can dissolve many other metals.

What household products might have mercury?

- Mercury fever thermometers.
- Fluorescent, high intensity light bulbs.
- Neon light bulbs.
- Watch batteries and other button-cell batteries.
- Some irons with automatic shutoffs.
- Some pesticides and cleaners.
- Elemental mercury is in some old toys (the silver liquid is visible) or old chemistry sets.

Should you stop using mercury containing light bulbs?

- No, they are much more energy efficient than other bulbs, which is good for the environment.
- Just be sure to handle them carefully to avoid breakage and recycle them when they are no longer useful (see info below).

How do you safely dispose of items that have mercury?

- When an item may contain mercury, **DO NOT** put any of it down the drain, **DO NOT** put it in the trash, and **DO NOT** burn it.
- South Bend residents can recycle household products that contain mercury at the Household Hazardous Waste Facility of St. Joseph County free of charge. It is located at 1105 East 5th Street, Mishawaka. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday 8:30am-3:30pm, call 574-235-9971 or visit www.swmd.org for more info.

What if there is an accidental spill at home?

- Air out the room where the spill occurred. Turn off the heat or air and cover the vents.
- Use rubber gloves and a mask if possible.
- **DO NOT** use a vacuum or broom to clean up a mercury spill. They will likely cause more vapors to be released and will contaminate the tool you are using.
- Use a card or stiff paper to push all the liquid droplets or powder together.
- Use an eye dropper or turkey baster to pick up liquid and put into a bag or container that can be tightly closed. Tape can be used to pick up powder, broken glass, or liquid that's on carpet.
- Put all pieces of the broken item, all materials used in the cleanup, and the mercury, in a tightly closed bag or container to be taken to the Household Hazardous Waste Facility.

What is mercury (Hg)?

- A useful but toxic metal.
- It's the only metal that's a liquid at room temperature.
- It cannot be destroyed.
- Its vapor is easily transported long distances before settling, or precipitating out.

Why is this important information?

- Mercury can cause severe health problems in humans and animals.
- It's near the top of EPA's list of priority chemicals that pose the greatest risk to the environment and public health, and has been determined to be one of the most critical pollutants to be reduced.
- Mercury accumulates in fish and is then transferred to humans and animals that eat the fish.
- Any mercury that gets washed down drains in the City of South Bend will end up at the Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- Because we are so close to the Great Lakes, the EPA and the State of Indiana have imposed a limit of 2.7ng/L on the amount of mercury that can leave a wastewater plant in treated water. This is roughly equal to 3 seconds in 32,000 years or 3 drops of ink in a shipping canal lock full of water!
- The facilities necessary to treat mercury at this low level are very expensive. The best way to lower the amount of mercury leaving the wastewater plant is to minimize the chance that it gets into the sewer.

Visit these websites for more information about mercury, products that contain mercury, its effect on health, and the Indiana fish consumption advisory:

http://www.in.gov/idem/recycle/2348.htm

http://www.epa.gov/mercury

http://www/epa.gov/hg/effects.htm

https://secure.in.gov/isdh/23650.htm

Provided by the City of South Bend Environmental Services Department

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Household Mercury Information

What You Can Do to Minimize Mercury Pollution and Protect the Health of the Community and our Waterways