

Environmental Guideline for Mercury-Containing Products and Waste Mercury



Department of Environment
Government of Nunavut

GUIDELINE: MERCURY-CONTAINING PRODUCTS AND WASTE MERCURY

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This Guideline has been prepared by the Department of Environment's Environmental Protection Division and approved by the Minister of Environment under the authority of Section 2.2 of the *Environmental Protection Act*.

This Guideline is not an official statement of the law and is provided for guidance only. Its intent is to increase the awareness and understanding of the risks, hazards and best management practices associated with common mercury-containing products and waste mercury. This Guideline does not replace the need for the owner or person in charge, management or control of the product or waste to comply with all applicable legislation and to consult with Nunavut's Department of Environment, other regulatory authorities and qualified persons with expertise in the management of mercury.

Copies of this Guideline are available upon request from:

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Electronic version of the Guideline is available at <http://env.gov.nu.ca/programareas/environmentprotection>

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Introduction

Mercury is a naturally-occurring element that is found in soil, air and water around the world. It is constantly being released from natural sources such as volcanic eruptions and the weathering of soil and rock. It can exist as a gas or in a range of organic and inorganic forms that vary in toxicity and can cycle between the earth's land, water and air. Mercury is a persistent substance. If released into the atmosphere, it can remain airborne for long periods of time and be deposited in soil and water in the Canadian Arctic, an area with no significant local industrial sources of mercury. Almost all forms of mercury are toxic to some degree or can be converted through biological activity into the highly toxic organic form called methylmercury. Mercury may also build up, or bioaccumulate¹ and biomagnify², in living organisms. This results in animals such as predatory fish, fish-eating birds and mammals being at a higher risk of harm from mercury than those species which do not prey upon other organisms.

Mercury has been used for many years in a variety of consumer and industrial products because it is an excellent conductor of electricity and reacts predictably to changes in temperature and pressure. Common consumer and industrial products that can contain mercury include fluorescent lamps, thermometers and thermostats, batteries, dental amalgam, medical and other measuring devices, and electrical switches and relays. Although the use of mercury in these products has declined significantly over the past several decades, stockpiles of older mercury-containing products and the current technical requirements of products such as fluorescent lamps and specialized batteries suggests that the elimination of mercury use is not expected soon. For this reason, mercury-containing products must continue to be actively managed.

The Guideline for Mercury-Containing Products and Waste Mercury (the Guideline) provides information on the risks, hazards and best management practices associated with various mercury-containing products commonly used in Nunavut. It examines the characteristics and effects of mercury on the environment and human health, identifies non-mercury alternatives for common products and provides guidance on the proper cleanup, storage, transportation and disposal of unwanted mercury.

The *Environmental Protection Act* enables the Government of Nunavut to implement measures to preserve, protect and enhance the quality of the natural environment. Section 2.2 of the *Act* provides the Minister with authority to develop, coordinate, and administer the Guideline.

The Guideline is not an official statement of the law. For further information and guidance, the owner or person in charge, management or control of a mercury-containing product or waste mercury is encouraged to review all applicable legislation and consult the Department of Environment, other regulatory agencies or qualified persons with expertise in the management of mercury.

1.1 Definitions

Commissioner's Land Lands that have been transferred by Order-in-Council to the Government of Nunavut. This includes roadways and land subject to block land transfers. Most Commissioner's Land is located within municipalities.

¹ The accumulation over time of metals and other persistent substances within an organism from both biotic (i.e. other organisms) or abiotic (i.e. land, air and water) sources.

² The progressive buildup of metals or other persistent substances through successive trophic levels – meaning that it relates to the concentration ratio in the tissue of a predator as compared to that in its prey.

<i>Contaminant</i>	Any noise, heat, vibration or substance and includes such other substance as the Minister may prescribe that, where discharged into the environment, (a) endangers the health, safety or welfare of persons, (b) interferes or is likely to interfere with normal enjoyment of life or property, (c) endangers the health of animal life, or (d) causes or is likely to cause damage to plant life or to property.
<i>Dangerous Good</i>	Any product, substance or organism included by its nature or by the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations in any of the classes listed in the schedule provided in the <i>Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act</i> .
<i>Environment</i>	The components of the Earth and includes (a) air, land and water, (b) all layers of the atmosphere, (c) all organic and inorganic matter and living organisms, and (d) the interacting natural systems that include components referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c) above.
<i>Hazardous Waste</i>	A contaminant that is a dangerous good and is no longer wanted or is unusable for its original intended purpose and is intended for storage, recycling, treatment or disposal.
<i>Mercury-Containing Product</i>	A manufactured device or part of a device that contains elemental mercury which is integral to its function.
<i>Minister</i>	The Minister of Environment of the Government of Nunavut.
<i>Qualified Person</i>	A person who has an appropriate level of knowledge and experience in all relevant aspects of waste management.
<i>Responsible Party</i>	The owner or person in charge, management or control of the waste.
<i>Transport Authority</i>	The statute and regulations controlling the management of hazardous waste under that mode of transport. These include (a) Road and Rail - <i>Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act (Canada) and Regulations; Interprovincial Movement of Hazardous Waste Regulations (CEPA) and Export and Import of Hazardous Waste and Hazardous Recyclable Material Regulations (CEPA)</i> . (b) Air – <i>International Air Transport Association (IATA) Dangerous Goods Regulations and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Technical Instructions</i> ; and (c) Marine – <i>International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code (IMDG)</i> .
<i>Waste Mercury</i>	Mercury that is no longer wanted or is unusable for its intended purpose and is intended for storage, recycling, treatment or disposal.

1.2 Roles and Responsibilities

1.2.1 Department of Environment

The Department of Environment is the key environmental agency responsible for ensuring responsible parties properly manage unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury and will provide advice and guidance on its management, including proper disposal. Authority is derived from the *Environmental Protection Act*, which prohibits the discharge of contaminants to the environment and enables the Minister to undertake actions to ensure appropriate management measures are in place. Although programs and services are applied primarily to activities taking place on Commissioner's and municipal lands and to Government of Nunavut undertakings, the *Environmental Protection Act* may be applied to the whole of the territory where other controlling legislation, standards and guidelines do not exist. A complete listing of relevant legislation and guidelines can be obtained by contacting the Department of Environment or by visiting the web site at <http://env.gov.nu.ca/programareas/environmentprotection>.

1.2.2 Generators of Unwanted Mercury-Containing Products and Waste Mercury

The owner or person in charge, management or control of the unwanted mercury-containing product or waste mercury is known as the responsible party. In general, the responsible party must ensure the unwanted product and waste mercury is properly and safely managed from the time it is produced to its final disposal. This is referred to as managing the product and waste from cradle-to-grave. Information on the general management of hazardous waste in Nunavut, including generators, carriers and receivers, can be obtained by referring to the *Environmental Guideline for the General Management of Hazardous Waste*.

Contractors may manage unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury on behalf of the responsible party. However, the responsible party remains liable for ensuring the method of management complies with all applicable statutes, regulations, standards, guidelines and local by-laws. If the contractor does not comply with the requirements of the *Environmental Protection Act* and is charged with a violation while managing the waste, the responsible party may also be charged.

1.2.3 Other Regulatory Agencies

Other regulatory agencies may have to be consulted regarding the management of unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury as there may be other environmental or public and worker health and safety issues to consider.

Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission

The Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission is responsible for promoting and regulating worker and workplace health and safety in Nunavut. The Commission derives its authority from the *Workers' Compensation Act* and the *Safety Act*, both of which require an employer to maintain a safe workplace and ensure the safety and well being of workers.

Department of Community and Government Services

The Department of Community and Government Services is responsible under the *Commissioners' Lands Act* for the issuance of land leases, reserves, licenses and permits on Commissioner's Lands. The Department, in cooperation with communities, is also responsible for the planning and funding of municipal solid waste and sewage disposal facilities in most Nunavut communities.

Department of Health and Social Services

Activities related to the management of unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury may have an impact on public health. The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Regional Environmental Health Officers should be consulted regarding legislated requirements under the *Public Health Act*.

Department of Economic Development and Transportation

The Motor Vehicles Division is responsible for ensuring the safe transport of hazardous waste and other dangerous goods by road through administration of the *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act*. The Department is also responsible under the *Motor Vehicles Act* for driver licensing and various other vehicle and road safety matters.

Environment Canada

Environment Canada is responsible for administering the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA). Mercury is listed as a Toxic Substance in Schedule I of CEPA and notices have been published in the Canada Gazette requiring the preparation and implementation of pollution prevention plans in regard to mercury releases from switches in end-of-life vehicles and dental amalgam waste. Environment Canada is also responsible for regulating international and interprovincial movement of hazardous waste, including unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury, under the *Interprovincial Movement of Hazardous Waste Regulations* and *Export and Import of Hazardous Waste and Hazardous Recyclable Material Regulations*. Environment Canada is also responsible for administering the pollution prevention provisions of the federal *Fisheries Act*.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is responsible under the *Territorial Lands Act* and *Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act* for the management of federal lands and waters in Nunavut, including the impact waste mercury may have on the quality of these lands and waters.

Local Municipal Governments

The role of municipal governments is important in the proper local management of unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury. Under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, municipalities are entitled to control their own municipal disposal sites. Unwanted waste may be deposited into municipal landfill sites and sewage lagoons only with the consent of the local government. The local fire department may also be called upon if a fire or other public safety issue is identified.

Co-management Boards and Agencies

Co-management boards and agencies established under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement have broad authority for land use planning, impact assessment and the administration of land and water. Activities involving the management and disposal of unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury may be controlled through the setting of terms and conditions in plans, permits and licenses issued by the Nunavut Water Board and other co-management boards and agencies.

Characteristics and Effects of Mercury

Mercury is a naturally occurring element that can be released to the environment from natural sources or through human activities. Natural sources include the release of mercury from the Earth's crust through volcanic activity and the weathering of soil and rock. Human activities contribute to mercury levels in the environment primarily through the burning of coal and the burning and landfilling of products or waste that contain mercury.

Elemental mercury is a shiny, silver-white metal that is liquid at room temperature. It is a persistent element that can cycle between the earth's land, water and air for long periods of time. Through a process known as 'atmospheric mercury depletion events'³ relatively high concentrations of mercury are now being found in the Canadian Arctic, a region with no significant industrial sources of the metal.

Several forms of mercury occur naturally in the environment with microorganisms and natural processes being able to change the mercury from one form to another. The most common natural forms of mercury found in the environment are metallic mercury, mercuric sulphide, mercuric chloride, and the organic form methylmercury. Being an element, mercury cannot be broken down or degraded further into harmless substances.

2.1 Effects on the Environment

All forms of mercury can accumulate in organisms to some degree. Of most importance is methylmercury, which is a fat soluble compound that readily bioaccumulates in living organisms and biomagnifies up the food chain. This can result in methylmercury levels in edible freshwater and saltwater fish, aquatic mammals and predatory birds that are thousands of times greater than levels in the surrounding water. Wildlife exposed to these high levels of methylmercury is at risk of harm. Depending upon the species and level of exposure, harmful effects can include slower growth, reproductive failure, death and the development of abnormal behaviors that can affect survival rates.

As little as 25 milligrams (or 25 thousandths of a gram) of mercury, the amount contained in many common consumer products, can contaminate as much as one hundred thousand litres of water beyond the safe limits for the protection of aquatic life⁴.

2.2 Effects on Human Health

Mercury is a neurotoxin that can cause damage to the brain, central nervous system, kidney and lungs in humans. The severity of the toxic effect depends on the form and concentration of mercury and its route of exposure. Methylmercury readily enters the brain and can lead to health effects including personality changes, tremors, changes in vision, deafness, loss of muscle coordination and sensation, memory loss, intellectual impairment, and in extreme cases, death. Mercury can also cross the placental barrier of pregnant mothers affecting the fetus while in the womb. Affected children may exhibit reduced coordination and growth, lower intelligence and seizures.

³ 'Atmospheric mercury depletion events' occur when a series of photochemical reactions involving halogens convert gaseous elemental mercury to a more reactive form. This new form of mercury then adheres to dust and other particles in the atmosphere and is deposited in the Arctic, sub-Arctic and Antarctic regions.

⁴ The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) has established 0.026 micrograms of inorganic mercury per litre of water as the water quality guideline for the protection of aquatic life.

Waste Management

Minimizing or avoiding the creation of pollutants and wastes can be more effective in protecting the environment than treating or cleaning them up after they have been created.⁵

Responsible waste management involves adopting methods and techniques that have been shown to prevent or reduce pollution. These policies, prohibitions of practices, maintenance and monitoring procedures can include reducing the amount of waste generated, reusing the waste for a different purpose or recycling the waste to produce a new product. Implementing these management practices is an effective way of reducing a person's costs, reducing pollution and reducing legal liabilities.

3.1 Pollution Prevention - Mercury-Containing Products and Non-Mercury Alternatives

Pollution prevention methods reduce or eliminate the creation of waste mercury. Scientific and technical advances in product manufacture and design have enabled the amount of mercury in many consumer, institutional, commercial and industrial products to be reduced or eliminated. In many cases, these non-mercury or low-mercury alternatives have the same performance characteristics and cost less to operate than the original mercury-containing product. The following sections introduce the common mercury-containing products used in Canada and their non-mercury alternatives.

3.1.1 Fluorescent and Other Lamps

Mercury is an essential element needed for the operation of most fluorescent, high intensity discharge and neon lamps. Light is produced when electricity passes through the lamp and excites the contained mercury vapour. The quantity of mercury in these lamps varies according to the type and size of the lamp. Table 1 describes the common types of mercury-containing lamps and their mercury content.

In recent years, industry has been able to reduce the amount of mercury in these lamps but, because it remains an essential element for the lamp's operation, small amounts of mercury continue to be used in their manufacture.

When fluorescent and other mercury-containing lamps burn out, much of the mercury tends to be absorbed by other lamp materials such as phosphorous and glass. However, a small amount of mercury still remains in vapour form, which can result in an inhalation hazard if the lamp is broken or crushed. Over 75% of the mercury used in lamps in Canada currently ends up in landfill sites.



Figure 1 - Compact Fluorescent Lamp Tube
Source – E. Paquin



Figure 2 - Linear Fluorescent Lamp Tube

⁵ Source – Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment.

Table 1. Mercury-Containing Lamps

Lamp Type	Description and Use	Mercury Content⁶
Linear Fluorescent	Linear fluorescent lamps are sealed glass tubes that are between 2 and 8 feet in length and contain small amounts of mercury, an inert gas and phosphor powder coating the inside of the tube. The lamps are commonly used in offices, stores, warehouses and homes.	3 to 50 milligrams
Compact Fluorescent	Compact fluorescent lamps (CFL's) have the same characteristics as linear fluorescent lamps except the glass tube has been replaced with a compact coil. CFL's are designed to replace the traditional incandescent lamp and are becoming increasingly common in homes and offices.	1 to 25 milligrams
Mercury Vapour Discharge	Mercury vapour lamps consist of a glass envelope with a pinched quartz glass tube and several electrodes within. Mercury vapour is contained within the glass tube. The lamps are used for street and floodlighting applications. The emitted light has a bluish glow.	25 to 225 milligrams
High Pressure Sodium Vapour Discharge	High pressure sodium vapour lamps (70 to 1000 watts) have the same physical characteristics as mercury vapour discharge lamps except they contain solid sodium, mercury and a small amount of neon and argon gas. Low pressure sodium vapour lamps (35 to 180 watts) do not contain mercury. Both are high intensity discharge lamps used for street and floodlighting applications. The emitted light has a yellowish glow.	20 to 145 milligrams
Metal Halide	Metal halide lamps have the same physical characteristics as mercury and sodium vapour discharge lamps except they contain metal halides, mercury and argon gas. Sodium iodide and scandium iodide are commonly used as the metal halide. These lamps are used to light sporting facilities where a very bright light is required.	25 to 225 milligrams
Neon	Neon lamps are similar to florescent lamps except that the colour emitted depends on the mixture of gases and the colour of the glass. Although the term refers to all gas discharge bulbs using noble gases, only the red lamps use neon. Red neon lamps do not contain mercury. Other neon lamps use argon, mercury and phosphor to produce additional colours.	Varies by colour and size

Non-Mercury Alternatives

Fluorescent and high intensity discharge lamps are currently the most energy-efficient lamps available for their specific applications and similar energy-efficient alternatives are currently not commonly available. Using these lamps in place of incandescent bulbs reduces the overall amount of greenhouse gases and other contaminants emitted from electrical generating stations powered by fossil fuels because of the lamp's energy efficiency. High-efficiency, low-mercury content lamps should be

⁶ To assist in putting mercury content into the proper context, one Canadian penny weighs approximately 2300 milligrams.

purchased whenever possible. In some cases, light emitting diode (LED) lamps can be used to replace neon and other mercury-containing lamps, although LED lamps can be more costly and cannot be used in all applications.



Figure 3 – High Pressure Sodium Discharge Lamp



Figure 5 – Mercury Vapour Lamp



Figure 4 – Metal Halide Lamp

3.1.2 Thermometers and Other Measuring Devices

Mercury has been used in a variety of measuring devices because the liquid reacts predictably to changes in temperature and pressure. Table 2 describes various mercury-containing measuring devices that can be found in Nunavut. These devices can be found in homes, schools, laboratories, hospitals, nursing stations, as well as commercial and industrial facilities.

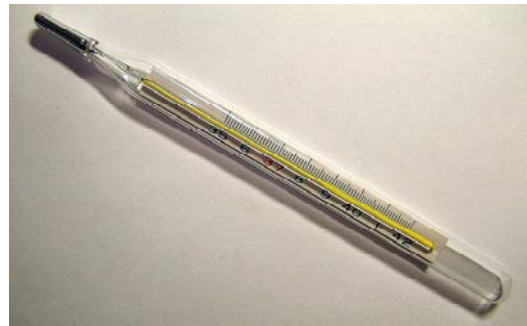


Figure 6 – Clinical Mercury Thermometer

Non-Mercury Alternatives

Various digital, mechanical and non-mercury liquid alternatives have been developed. Table 2 provides a list of several non-mercury alternatives for thermometers and other measuring devices. Availability, product effectiveness and relative cost should be considered when switching to a non-mercury alternative.



Figure 7 - Electronic Clinical Thermometers

Table 2. Mercury-Containing Measuring Devices

Device Type	Description and Use	Alternatives
Thermometer	Thermometers measure temperature. Held within a bulb at the base of the instrument, heat and cold causes the mercury to move up and down a thin tube where its position indicates the temperature. Various types of thermometers exist and can be found in homes, laboratories, schools and industries.	Digital, alcohol or spirit-filled thermometer
Barometer and Manometer	Barometers measure air pressure while manometers measure pressure differences. They consist of long tubes filled with mercury where air pressure causes the mercury to move up or down the tube. These devices are commonly used at airports and other weather stations.	Digital or aneroid barometer, digital manometer or needle bourdon gauge
Flowmeter	Flowmeters measure the rate of flow of gas, water and air streams. Although no longer manufactured, mercury-containing flowmeters are still used in water and sewage treatment plants, power stations and other industrial applications.	Digital or ball-actuated flowmeter
Hydrometer	Hydrometers measure the specific gravity and density of a liquid. They look similar to a thermometer except the bulb at the bottom is wider and weighted to keep the hydrometer upright when placed in a liquid. Hydrometers are commonly used in laboratories and in the production of alcohol.	Spirit filled hydrometer
Hygrometer	Hygrometers measure the moisture content of air. The most common type, the psychrometer, looks like a dual thermometer, one with a wet base and the other with a dry base. Hygrometers are used for weather forecasting.	Digital or spirit-filled psychrometer
Medical Devices	Examples of medical devices that contain mercury include: sphygmomanometers (measure blood pressure), esophageal dilators (open the patient's throat during surgery), and gastrointestinal tubes (removal of intestinal obstructions).	Aneroid or digital sphygmomanometer

3.1.3 Thermostats

Mercury-containing thermostats are used to control residential, commercial and institutional heating and cooling systems. These thermostats contain small glass containers, or ampoules, of mercury which act as temperature-sensitive tilt switches to automatically control the furnace or other device. Each ampoule generally contains three grams of mercury, with each thermostat having up to six ampoules depending upon its application.



Figure 8 - Home Thermostat

Thermostats that contain mercury can be identified by removing the front cover of the device and visually inspecting its contents. If there are glass ampoules inside that contain a shiny silver-white liquid, it is most likely mercury.

Non-Mercury Alternatives

Mercury-containing thermostats can be replaced using relatively inexpensive digital thermostats. Most modern digital thermostats are programmable, which enables temperature in a building to be automatically adjusted according to a predetermined schedule. This results in energy and cost savings.

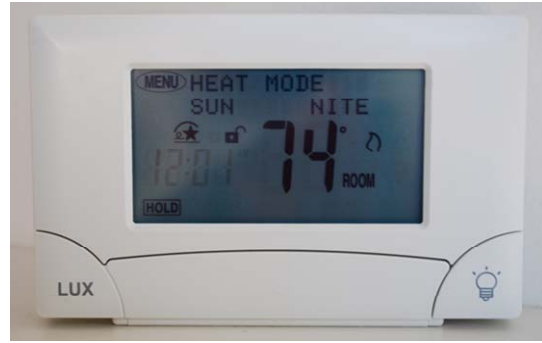


Figure 9 - Touch Screen Digital Thermostat

3.1.4 Batteries

Since the late 1990’s North American battery manufacturers have eliminated or significantly reduced the mercury found in batteries. The use of mercury in the common alkaline battery has been eliminated while small amounts of mercury – anywhere from 5 to 25 milligrams - continue to be used in the manufacture of several types of button-cell batteries⁷. Button-cell batteries are small, thin energy cells that are not rechargeable. They continue to be used in a wide variety of electronic devices because of their small size and steady voltage output. Table 3 describes the common button-cell batteries in use today.



Examples of various sized button cell batteries.

Figure 10
Source – Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation

Table 3. Mercury-Containing Button-Cell Batteries

Battery Type	Common Uses
Zinc Air Miniature Batteries	Mostly used in hearing aids because of their high energy concentration and ability to continuously discharge energy. May also be used in small devices such as wristwatch pagers and ear speech processors.
Silver Oxide Button-Cell Batteries	Used in various devices such as hearing aids, watches, cameras and clocks. Silver oxide batteries may come in a large size as well as button-cell however, their manufacture is limited due to the price of silver.
Alkaline Manganese Oxide Button-Cell Batteries	Used in toys, calculators, remote control devices and cameras.

⁷ Gas can form in button-cell batteries because of the corrosion of zinc causing the battery to leak. Mercury suppresses this corrosion. Button-cell batteries can contain up to 0.005 grams of mercury in the insulating paper surrounding the battery, or mercury can be mixed in the battery anode itself.

Mercuric oxide batteries contain mercury as the electrode and are useful in applications that require a high energy density and steady voltage output. Although North American battery manufacturers discontinued production of these batteries in 1996, larger mercuric oxide batteries may still be used in applications such as military, medical and industrial equipment.

Non-Mercury Alternatives

Few mercury-free alternatives currently exist for button-cell batteries and those that do exist are generally considered to have reduced performance and a higher cost. Observing battery packaging and labeling is the best method for identifying mercury-free or mercury-reduced button-cell batteries. Electrical devices that can operate on standard 110 volt power supplies (i.e. smoke and carbon dioxide detectors) should be purchased where practical rather than battery-powered devices. The use of rechargeable batteries is also a good alternative to non-rechargeable batteries where the replacements are compatible with the device.

3.1.5 Switches and Relays



Figure 11 - Mercury-Containing Switches
Source – California Department of Toxic Substances Control

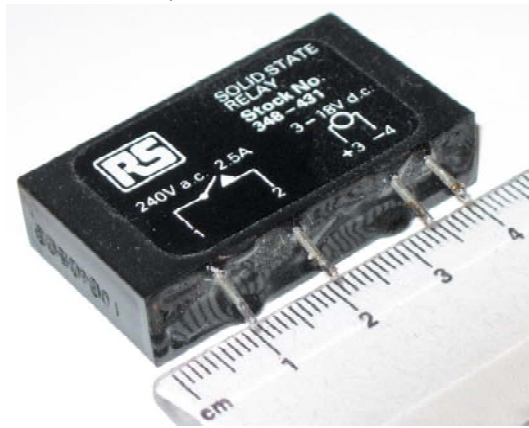


Figure 12 – Solid State Relay Switch

Switches are products that open or close an electrical circuit. When open, switches allow the electrical current to flow and when closed the circuit is broken and flow of current is stopped. Many older switches contain mercury because of the metallic liquid's excellent ability to conduct electricity. The most common consumer applications have been in tilt switches (i.e. older-model thermostats, hood and trunk lights on older-model vehicles) and float switches (i.e. boat bilge pumps).

Relays are products that open or close electrical contacts to control the operation of other electrical devices. They enable large electrical loads to be turned on or off by supplying relatively small currents to a control circuit.

Table 4 describes various mercury-containing switches and relays used in Canada and their available non-mercury alternatives.

Non-Mercury Alternatives

Mechanical and digital switches are widely available to replace mercury switches for all common applications. These vary in price depending on use and design. Not all non-mercury alternatives may be suitable for any one application without retrofit as electrical requirements must be strictly adhered to. If in doubt, the manufacturers or distributors of the specific equipment should be consulted.

Displacement and contactor relays are very specific for

their applications and non-mercury alternatives have generally not provided equal performance and reliability. Mercury wetted relays can be replaced by dry magnetic reed relays for most applications.

Table 4. Mercury-Containing Switches and Relays

Device Type	Description and Use	Alternatives
Float Switch	Float switches monitor liquid levels and are most commonly used in sump pumps. They are also used in boat bilge pumps, boilers, sewage treatment plants and pumping stations. The mercury is normally contained inside a sealed ampoule within a cylindrical outer casing.	Mechanical, optical, metallic ball, sonic or ultrasonic, pressure transmitter, alloy, thermal or capacitance float switches
Tilt Switch	Tilt switches are activated by a change in the switch position. They have been commonly used in older-model thermostats as well as applications that activate upon opening such as hood and trunk lights in older-model vehicles and chest freezers. Mercury tilt switches are typically small glass tubes with two electrical contacts at one end.	Metallic ball, electrolytic, mechanical, digital or capacitance tilt switches
Pressure Switch	Pressure switches are activated by a change in pressure. These switches have been used in HVAC systems, medical devices, automobiles (ABS brakes), appliances and other applications. Pressure switches are comprised of a diaphragm, piston or other pressure-response device coupled with a mercury ampoule.	Mechanical or digital switches
Temperature Switch	Temperature switches are activated by a change in temperature. These switches are used in a wide variety of applications including food warming trays, hot water boilers, ovens, sterilizers and heat exchangers. The switch is similar to a tilt switch and is usually attached to a temperature sensing device such as a bi-metallic strip.	Mechanical or digital switches
Relays	Relays are devices that open or close electrical control circuits to operate other devices in the same or different electrical circuit. They include displacement, contactor and wetted reed relays. Relays are commonly used in electronic circuit boards, commercial and industrial electric ranges and other cooking equipment.	Dry magnetic reed relays

3.1.6 Dental Amalgam

Dental amalgam is a mixture of metals that has been used for over 150 years to restore teeth. The metal mixture, commonly referred to as ‘silver fillings’, can consist of up to 50% mercury. Despite its use for many years, there is currently no evidence to suggest that mercury in dental amalgam is a risk to human health in the general population.

Mercury amalgam continues to be used for tooth restorations because of its durability, ease of use and low cost⁸. In the past, dentists mixed the amalgam on site using bulk mercury and metal powders. This practice resulted in a health risk to workers through physical contact with the elemental mercury and to the environment through spillage. Today, dental amalgam is purchased in pre-dosed amalgam capsules that come in different sizes.

In 2001, federal, provincial and territorial governments endorsed the *Canada-Wide Standard on Mercury for Dental Amalgam Waste* through the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME). The Standard called for dentists to apply 'best management practices' to achieve a 95% national reduction in mercury releases from dental amalgam by 2005. These practices include the installation, use and maintenance of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certified amalgam separators, traps and filters to remove waste mercury from dental office wastewater. A report released in 2007 indicates that 70% of dentists operating in Canada were employing ISO certified amalgam separators (Environment Canada, 2007).

Non-Mercury Alternatives

There are several resin and composite materials that are substitutes for mercury amalgam. These include cast gold, bonded amalgam and dental ceramics. These alternatives are usually more costly than mercury amalgam fillings and may not be suitable for all procedures. Composite resins are tooth-coloured plastic materials often used to restore front teeth where a natural appearance is important. These resins can also be used as fillings on back teeth depending on the location and extent of tooth decay.

3.2 What to do if a Spill of Mercury Occurs

Cleanup actions must be started as soon as possible following a spill of mercury so workers and family members are not exposed to its hazards. When a thermometer or other liquid mercury-containing product is broken, the mercury will quickly form beads that accumulate in small pools and in the tiniest of spaces, making cleanup difficult. When a fluorescent or other mercury-containing lamp is broken or if mercury remains trapped (i.e. in tiny spaces, drains or soft surfaces such as carpet and furniture), mercury vapour is released directly to the air. Although mercury evaporates slowly at normal room temperature, dangerous levels of mercury vapour can build up in indoor air.

The following should be considered when cleaning up a spill of mercury:

- It can be very dangerous to touch liquid mercury directly or breathe mercury vapour. Immediately isolate the spill area by keeping people and pets away, closing all interior doors that lead to other rooms in the building and turning off heaters. Ventilate the area by turning on fans that vent directly to the outdoors and opening windows and exterior doors.
- Protect yourself by changing into old clothing and shoes that can be thrown away after clean up has been completed, removing all jewelry as mercury can adhere to metal and putting on gloves, preferably made of rubber, nitrile or latex.
- On a hard surface (i.e. linoleum, tile or concrete), push the mercury beads together using razor blades, stiff paper or cardboard, pick up the beads using a dustpan or stiff paper and carefully transfer the mercury into a wide-mouth container or plastic bag. Any remaining beads of

⁸ Approximately 1.3 tonnes of mercury in new filling material is placed each year in the mouths of Canadians (CCME, 2001).

mercury can be picked up using tape, cotton balls or a moist paper towel. All debris should be placed inside the container or bag and the lid sealed tightly with tape.

- On a soft surface (i.e. carpet, couch or clothing), it is best to cut out the contaminated materials and place them into a sealable container or plastic bag. If you're not willing to cut out the materials, use cotton balls, moist paper towel or an eye dropper to pick up the spilled mercury and place it, along with any debris, into the container or bag.
- When a fluorescent or other mercury-containing lamp is broken, quickly ventilate the area by turning on fans that vent to the outdoors and opening all windows and exterior doors. Leave the area for at least 30 minutes and then follow the instructions for the type of surface to be cleaned.
- In every case, place the sealed container or plastic bag containing the mercury and debris into another container or bag for additional protection against breakage and leakage.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and take a shower immediately after the cleanup.

Never allow people who are wearing clothing or shoes contaminated with mercury to walk around the building, never use a broom or ordinary vacuum cleaner to clean up mercury, never pour mercury down a drain and never launder mercury-contaminated clothing in a washing machine.

Mercury spill kits are commercially available from safety supply companies to assist in the cleanup of spilled mercury. Although convenient, these kits may be expensive and are not absolutely necessary to clean up a small contained spill of mercury, such as from a mercury switch or thermometer. The following are some commonly available items that can be used to construct a mercury spill kit: rubber gloves, goggles or other eye protection, flashlight, sponge or cotton balls, wide duct or masking tape, eye dropper or syringe without needle, stiff index cards, plastic containers with tight-fitting lids and plastic bags with zipper seals.

All spills of mercury must immediately be reported to the NWT/Nunavut 24-Hour Spill Report Line at (867) 920-8130 (toll free) or e-mailed to: spills@gov.nt.ca. Spill reporting forms are available on the Department of Environment's website: <http://env.gov.nu.ca/programareas/environmentprotection>

The local nursing station or health authority should also immediately be notified.

3.3 Storage

Storage refers to keeping unwanted material while awaiting its transport, recycling or disposal. Except under extraordinary circumstances, storage is not acceptable for the long-term management of unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury and should be considered as a temporary measure only.

Unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury should be stored in the following manner:

- If the packaging that was used to originally ship the product is available and the product is unbroken, place it in the packaging and seal the package securely with tape.
- If the original packaging is not available or if the mercury is from a spill, place the product or container containing the mercury and any cleanup materials and debris inside a larger metal or plastic container. Place kitty litter or other oil absorbent packing material around the product or

small container to protect it from breaking or sudden shock. Secure the larger container with a tight fitting lid or tape.

- Clearly label all storage containers as containing mercury according to the requirements of the *Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)* and relevant Transport Authority.
- Place all labeled storage containers in a clearly marked designated area which is separate from other waste to prevent its disposal with normal garbage.
- If mercury-containing lamps are being stored, do not crush the lamps as crushing will release vapours that may pose health and environmental hazards. Broken lamps are a hazardous waste.

If the storage facility is used for commercial purposes to store hazardous waste for periods of 180 days or more or the quantity of waste stored on-site exceeds the criteria set out in the *Environmental Guideline for the General Management of Hazardous Waste*, the facility must be registered with the Department of Environment as a hazardous waste management facility⁹. Copies of registration forms are available at <http://env.gov.nu.ca/programareas/environmentprotection/forms-applications> or by contacting Nunavut's Department of Environment. Refer to the GN *Environmental Guideline for the General Management of Hazardous Waste* for additional information on the registration process.

3.4 Transportation

Unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury may be classified as a hazardous waste for the purposes of transportation depending upon the quantity of waste being transported for recycling or disposal. Under the federal *Interprovincial Movement of Hazardous Waste Regulations*, no person may transport waste mercury in Canada in a quantity greater than five kilograms or five litres unless it is accompanied by a completed manifest¹⁰. Manifesting requirements for the international transport of waste are controlled under the federal *Export and Import of Hazardous Waste and Recyclable Material Regulations*. Manifest forms are available from Nunavut's Department of Environment and completion instructions are included on the reverse side of each manifest. Further information on manifesting can be obtained by referring to Environment Canada's *User's Guide for the Hazardous Waste Manifest* or the *Environmental Guideline for the General Management of Hazardous Waste*.

The classification, packaging, labeling and placarding of mercury-containing products and waste mercury while being transported must conform to the federal and territorial *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act and Regulations*. Schedule I of the *Regulations* classify waste mercury as follows¹¹:

Shipping Name:	WASTE Mercury
	Classification: 8
	Product Identification Number: UN2809
	Packing Group: III

⁹ The criterion for Class 8 Corrosives is 1000 kilograms and the criterion for the aggregate quantity of hazardous waste is 5000 kilograms.

¹⁰ In response to the 2007 federal government direction on streamlining regulation in Canada, the alignment of definitions in the *Interprovincial Movement of Hazardous Waste Regulations (IMHWR)* and *Export and Import of Hazardous Waste and Hazardous Recyclable Material Regulations (EIHWRMR)* is being undertaken by Environment Canada. Under the current proposal, the quantity of waste mercury requiring a manifest while being transported in Canada would be revised to less than 50 milliliters (ml) per shipment, which is the same as is currently required for international transport under the EIHWRMR (Environment Canada, 2010).

¹¹ A wide variety of mercury-containing chemicals and compounds in addition to elemental mercury are available for use in Canada. Refer to Schedule I of the *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations* for the specific classification, product identification number and packing group of these chemicals and compounds.

The transport of mercury-containing products and waste mercury by air must conform to the *International Air Transport Association (IATA) Dangerous Goods Regulations* and *International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Technical Instructions*, while transport by marine must conform to the *International Marine Dangerous Goods Code*. Further information on transporting these materials can be obtained by contacting Transport Canada or the appropriate Transport Authority.

Hazardous waste generators, carriers and receivers operating in Nunavut must be registered with the Nunavut Department of Environment. A unique registration number is assigned to each registrant through the registration process, which enables completion of the manifest document. Copies of registration forms are available at <http://env.gov.nu.ca/programareas/environmentprotection/forms-applications> or by contacting Nunavut's Department of Environment. Refer to the *Environmental Guideline for the General Management of Hazardous Waste* for additional information on the registration process.

A listing of hazardous waste carriers, receivers and hazardous waste management facilities registered to operate in Nunavut is available by contacting Nunavut's Department of Environment.

3.5 Disposal

Municipal landfill sites and sewage lagoons in Canada have over the years become a major source of mercury to the environment. Unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury must never be thrown in the garbage and liquid mercury must never be poured down the drain¹².

Recycling and disposal options for unwanted mercury-containing products and waste mercury in Nunavut are limited. The majority of these materials are used in government, commercial, industrial and institutional facilities and any unwanted or end-of-life products should be safely stored until they can be transported to a registered hazardous waste receiver that is licensed to recycle or dispose of mercury. Names of Canadian recyclers and disposal companies are available by contacting the waste management exchanges and associations listed in Appendix 10 of the *Environmental Guideline for the General Management of Hazardous Waste*. Additional information on commercial processors of mercury-containing waste can be obtained through the following web site links:

- lamprecycle.org/ - The lamprecycle.org web site is an American resource of information on mercury-containing lamp recycling and lists several lamp recycling companies in Canada.
- www.almr.org/ - The Association of Lighting and Mercury Recyclers represents the majority of commercial processors of mercury-containing waste in the United States, some of which also operate in Canada.

Some Municipalities in Nunavut are starting to implementing programs aimed at collecting and safely storing unwanted or end-of-life fluorescent lamps and other mercury-containing products as part of their household garbage collection programs. Homeowners wishing to dispose of these wastes should contact their municipality for local disposal information.

¹² The *Guideline for Industrial Waste Discharges* prohibits the disposal of mercury in sewage lagoons and landfills if mercury is present in excess of 0.1 milligrams per litre (parts per million) based on leachate quality test results.

Conclusion

Mercury is a naturally occurring element that is found in soil, air and water around the world and which can take many different forms, some of which are harmful to humans and wildlife. Mercury has also been used for many years in a variety of consumer and industrial products because of its ability to conduct electricity and react predictably to changes in temperature and pressure. The Guideline is an introduction to the risks, hazards and best management practices associated with various mercury-containing products and waste mercury. It examines the characteristics and effects of mercury on the environment and human health, identifies non-mercury alternatives for common products and provides guidance on the proper cleanup of spilled mercury and the storage, transportation and disposal of unwanted products.

Familiarity with the Guideline does not replace the need for the owner or person in charge, management or control of mercury-containing products and waste mercury to comply with all applicable federal and territorial legislation and municipal by-laws. The management of these materials may also be controlled through permits and licenses issued by Nunavut's co-management boards, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and other regulatory agencies. These permits and licenses must be complied with at all times.

For additional information on the management of mercury-containing products and waste mercury, or to obtain a complete listing of available guidelines, go to the Department of Environment web site or contact the Department at:

Environmental Protection Division
Department of Environment
Government of Nunavut
Inuksugait Plaza, P.O. Box 1000, Station 1360
Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0

Telephone: (867) 975-7729

Fax: (867) 975-7739

Email: EnvironmentalProtection@gov.nu.ca

Website: <http://env.gov.nu.ca/programareas/environmentprotection>

References

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United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Global Mercury Assessment, (2002).

United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). Mercury Releases and Spills Website – <http://www.epa.gov/mercury/spills>.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 - ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT

The following are excerpts from the *Environmental Protection Act*

1. "Contaminant" means any noise, heat, vibration or substance and includes such other substance as the Minister may prescribe that, where discharged into the environment,
 - (a) endangers the health, safety or welfare of persons,
 - (b) interferes or is likely to interfere with normal enjoyment of life or property,
 - (c) endangers the health of animal life, or
 - (d) causes or is likely to cause damage to plant life or to property;

"Discharge" includes, but not so as to limit the meaning, any pumping, pouring, throwing, dumping, emitting, burning, spraying, spreading, leaking, spilling, or escaping;

"Environment" means the components of the Earth and includes

- (a) air, land and water,
- (b) all layers of the atmosphere,
- (c) all organic and inorganic matter and living organisms, and
- (d) the interacting natural systems that include components referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c).

"Inspector" means a person appointed under subsection 3(2) and includes the Chief Environmental Protection Officer.

- 2.2 The Minister may
 - (a) establish, operate and maintain stations to monitor the quality of the environment in the Territories;
 - (b) conduct research studies, conferences and training programs relating to contaminants and to the preservation, protection or enhancement of the environment;
 - (c) develop, co-ordinate and administer policies, standards, guidelines and codes of practice relating to the preservation, protection or enhancement of the environment;
 - (d) collect, publish and distribute information relating to contaminants and to the preservation, protection or enhancement of the environment:
3.
 - (1) The Minister shall appoint a Chief Environmental Protection Officer who shall administer and enforce this Act and the regulations.
 - (2) The Chief Environmental Protection Officer may appoint inspectors and shall specify in the appointment the powers that may be exercised and the duties that may be performed by the inspector under this Act and regulations.
5.
 - (1) Subject to subsection (3), no person shall discharge or permit the discharge of a contaminant into the environment.
 - (3) Subsection (1) does not apply where the person who discharged the contaminant or permitted the discharge of the contaminant establishes that
 - (a) the discharge is authorized by this Act or the regulations or by an order issued under this Act or the regulations;
 - (b) the contaminant has been used solely for domestic purposes and was discharged from within a dwelling house;
 - (c) the contaminant was discharged from the exhaust system of a vehicle;

- (d) the discharge of the contaminant resulted from the burning of leaves, foliage, wood, crops or stubble for domestic or agricultural purposes;
- (e) the discharge of the contaminant resulted from burning for land clearing or land grading;
- (f) the discharge of the contaminant resulted from a fire set by a public official for habitat management of silviculture purposes;
- (g) the contaminant was discharged for the purposes of combating a forest fire;
- (h) the contaminant is a soil particle or grit discharged in the course of agriculture or horticulture; or
- (i) the contaminant is a pesticide classified and labelled as "domestic" under the *Pest Control Products Regulations* (Canada).

(4) The exceptions set out in subsection (3) do not apply where a person discharges a contaminant that the inspector has reasonable grounds to believe is not usually associated with a discharge from the excepted activity.

- 5.1. Where a discharge of a contaminant into the environment in contravention of this Act or the regulations or the provisions of a permit or license issued under this Act or the regulations occurs or a reasonable likelihood of such a discharge exists, every person causing or contributing to the discharge or increasing the likelihood of such a discharge, and the owner or the person in charge, management or control of the contaminant before its discharge or likely discharge, shall immediately:
- (a) subject to any regulations, report the discharge or likely discharge to the person or office designated by the regulations;
 - (b) take all reasonable measures consistent with public safety to stop the discharge, repair any damage caused by the discharge and prevent or eliminate any danger to life, health, property or the environment that results or may be reasonably expected to result from the discharge or likely discharge; and
 - (c) make a reasonable effort to notify every member of the public who may be adversely affected by the discharge or likely discharge.
6. (1) Where an inspector believes on reasonable grounds that a discharge of a contaminant in contravention of this Act or the regulations or a provision of a permit or license issued under this Act or the regulations has occurred or is occurring, the inspector may issue an order requiring any person causing or contributing to the discharge or the owner or the person in charge, management or control of the contaminant to stop the discharge by the date named in the order.
7. (1) Notwithstanding section 6, where a person discharges or permits the discharge of a contaminant into the environment, an inspector may order that person to repair or remedy any injury or damage to the environment that results from the discharge.
- (2) Where a person fails or neglects to repair or remedy any injury or damage to the environment in accordance with an order made under subsection (1) or where immediate remedial measures are required to protect the environment, the Chief Environmental Protection Officer may cause to be carried out the measures that he or she considers necessary to repair or remedy an injury or damage to the environment that results from any discharge.

APPENDIX 2 – GOVERNMENT CONTACTS

Government of Nunavut

Environmental Protection Division
Department of Environment
Inuksugait Plaza
P.O. Box 1000, Station 1360
Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0
Telephone: (867) 975-7729 Fax: (867) 975-7739

Motor Vehicles Division
Department of Economic Development and
Transportation
P.O. Box 10
Gjoa Haven, Nunavut X0B 1J0
Telephone: (867) 360-4615 Fax: (867) 360-4619

Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission
P.O. Box 669
Baron Building/1091
Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0
Telephone: 1-877-404-4407 (toll free) Fax: 1-866-
979-8501

Department of Community and Government
Services (all Divisions)
P.O. Box 1000, Station 700
4th Floor, W.G. Brown Building
Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0
Telephone: (867) 975-5400 Fax: (867) 975-5305

Office of Chief Medical Health Officer of Health
Department of Health and Social Services
P.O. Box 1000, Station 1000
Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0
Telephone: (867) 975-5774 Fax: (867) 975-5755

Government of Canada

Indian and Northern Affairs – Nunavut Region
P.O. Box 2200
Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0
Telephone: (867) 975-4500 Fax: (867) 975-4560

Environment Canada (NWT and Nunavut)
5019 52nd Street
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories X1A 1T5
Telephone: (867) 669-4730 Fax: (867) 873-8185

Department of Transport – Road, Rail, Marine, Air
P.O. Box 8550
344 Edmonton Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 1P6
Telephone: 1-888-463-0521 (toll free)
Fax: (204) 983-8992 Road, Rail and Marine only
Fax: (204) 983-1734 Air only