

RECYCLING MERCURY DEVICES



Barnstable County Hazardous Materials Program, UMass Extension, Senior Environment Corps and Covanta • SEMASS, are collecting mercury-containing devices and disposing of them properly. Join this effort to protect the Cape and its resources!

DID YOU KNOW . . .

- ▶ The FDA and 41 states warn consumers to limit or not eat certain fish because of mercury contamination?
- ▶ The sale of mercury thermometers is banned in Boston and other cities across the US?
- ▶ The human body cannot break down mercury, so mercury accumulates in the body?

Why be concerned? Mercury thermostats and switches are a major source of mercury in the solid waste stream. In normal use, the consumer or contractor is not exposed to the mercury in these products since the mercury is contained in a shock-absorbent glass or metal bulb. However, when thermostats and switches are mishandled, burned or broken when disposed of by incineration or landfilling, mercury can be released into the air and water, harming our environment and people.

In humans, mercury contamination affects speech, motor skills, and rational thought. People can be affected by mercury by inhaling fumes from broken mercury objects and eating contaminated fish.

Please bring thermostats, switches and other mercury-containing devices to the

**Harwich Transfer Station
or
Harwich Household Hazardous
Products Collections**

Why is mercury used? Mercury has unique characteristics which make it effective in switches used in thermostats and household appliances. Because of its excellent conductivity and high surface tension, the mercury rolls freely inside the glass bulb of a mercury switch. As it moves within the switch, the mercury makes or breaks electrical circuits, signaling the call for heating or cooling from a furnace or air conditioner. Mercury thermostats are recognized by the industry for their accuracy, reliability, and long life.

Do all thermostats contain mercury?

No. There are non-mercury alternatives! Some examples include electronic, snap-action, and reed switch thermostats.

Why recycle mercury-containing items?

It is important to keep the environment clean by preventing toxic materials from entering the waste stream. Mercury from thermostats is easily recycled, and this program is just one of the ways the state, towns, businesses, and consumers are collecting mercury for safe disposal. The program provides a convenient way for contractors and consumers to dispose of used thermostats.

DID YOU KNOW . . .

How much mercury is contained in each item?

Fever thermometer	1 gram
Thermostat	3 grams
Switch	5–35 grams
Blood pressure gauge	110 grams

Note: 28.5 grams = 1 ounce

How can you help? All you need to do is bring your thermostats and other mercury-containing devices to Harwich's Transfer Station or Household Hazardous Products Collections. All products are picked up for recycling. Please *do not remove the mercury bulb* from the thermostats.



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