

Universal Waste Mercury-Containing Equipment (MCE)



Mercury-containing equipment means a device or part of a device that contains elemental mercury integral to its function (40CFR273.9). This term does not apply to equipment and devices from which the mercury-containing components have been removed. For example, older thermostats contained mercury switches; when the ampules of mercury are removed, the remaining components are no longer regulated for disposal. Also the term does not apply to equipment that is not yet a waste. In other words, we are not required to remove a

piece of equipment from service simply because it contains mercury. Other types of mercury-containing equipment include thermometers, barometers, manometers, natural gas safety relays, blood pressure cuffs, and tilt switches in older appliances and automobiles.

Mercury is toxic, and in its elemental form, volatilizes easily. If the mercury from a broken thermostat ampule was allowed to evaporate in a small room, the air concentration of mercury could exceed occupational exposure limits.

Mercury-containing equipment is regulated as a “universal waste.” As with other universal wastes (lamps, batteries, and pesticides), mercury-containing equipment must be managed in a way that prevents releases to the environment.

Accumulation

- Do not remove mercury ampules from thermostats or other electrical switches.
- Place the mercury-containing equipment in a resealable plastic bag and seal it.
- Mark the bag “Universal Waste – Mercury Containing Equipment.”
- Mark the date on the bag.
- If there is any evidence of leakage, spillage, or damage to the device, place the device in plastic container, such as a 5-gallon bucket, put the lid on the container, and seal it with electrical tape.
- Submit a [Chemical Waste Collection Request](#) to EHS. Attach the printed label to the bag or other container.
- Mercury-containing equipment may not accumulate for longer than one year from the date the waste is generated.

Spills

- Small spills involve amounts that may have been released from a broken thermometer.
- Spills larger than about 2 tablespoons may require notification to regulatory agencies.
- Contact EHS at (208) 885-6524 immediately if spill is larger than the amount in a thermometer.
- Do not use a vacuum cleaner, broom, or mop to clean up the spill.
- Contain the spill by putting pieces of duct tape over the mercury droplets.
- Open exterior windows.
- Seal off the area and advise others of the spill (e.g. post a sign “Caution – Mercury Spill”).
- If anyone is contaminated, have them wait in a nearby area until they can change their clothing.
- Double-bag all contaminated material and label it “Mercury Contaminated Waste.” The waste must be disposed as hazardous waste.
- [See detailed instructions.](#)

