

Mercury Control and Minimization Program

Mercury is a commonly known substance with uncommon properties. It is a metal, the only metal commonly found in a liquid form. It is a good conductor of electricity. It is 13 times heavier than water.

These properties make it very useful in everyday life. Mercury electrical switches are commonly found in thermostats and in some other devices. Mercury is used in thermometers and air pressure manometers. Fluorescent lamps light up because of the mercury in them. Amalgam, which contains mercury, fills cavities in our teeth. Mercury is also commonly used in batteries.

Along with all the benefits, there are concerns about mercury. Liquid mercury gives off a vapor. This vapor form of mercury, called methyl-mercury, is a health hazard. Methyl-mercury affects the central nervous system. It causes irritability, memory loss, personality changes, blurred or restricted vision, malaise, speech difficulties, and deafness. The symptoms develop after constant or high level exposure to methyl-mercury.

Fortunately, the body can rid itself of the mercury contamination when removed from exposure to it. This is the reason behind limiting the amount or frequency of eating fish from certain lakes and streams. It gives the body time to clear out the mercury.

Fish are exposed to mercury because the methyl-mercury also dissolves in water. Methyl-mercury enters the atmosphere as a vapor. Precipitation captures the vapor, washing it out of the atmosphere. The mercury containing water eventually finds its way to lakes and streams where it is captured in sediments. The mercury makes its way up the food chain to the fish at the top.

The Village of Plover has been active in reducing mercury by sponsoring mercury thermometer collections and working with the other local agencies to encourage recycling. The Wastewater Utility recently embarked on a program to minimize the mercury contamination from sources connected to the sanitary sewer collection and treatment system.

The Utility is working with several groups that traditionally use mercury. They are replacing mercury containing devices and chemicals with non mercury replacements. They are also employing practices to remove and recycle spent mercury compounds prior to discharge to the sanitary sewer.

Village residents can also help reduce mercury contamination in the environment. Place any liquid mercury in a sealed, unbreakable container. Contact a recycler or use the Portage County Continuous Clean Sweep / Hazardous Materials Collection program to dispose of it. Do not put it in the garbage or down the drain.

Mercury thermometers can also be taken to the Portage County Continuous Clean Sweep / Hazardous Materials Collection program for a small fee. Call 715 346-1931 for fees and to arrange drop off.

Recycle old fluorescent lamps and rechargeable batteries. Do not dispose of in the garbage. The Portage County Solid Waste Transfer Facility recycles lamps and batteries for a small fee. Menards accepts only the compact fluorescent lamps for recycling.

Talk to your electrical or heating contractor about proper removal and recycling of mercury containing devices such as thermostats and electrical switches.

Help the Village by removing and recycling mercury. For further information on mercury recycling, please call:

Recycling Connections Corporation 345-5972

Plover Wastewater Utility 345-5259

Portage County Solids Waste Department 346-1931