



Department of Environmental Protection

One Winter Street Boston, MA 02108 • 617-292-5500

Guidance: Cleaning Up Spills of Elemental Mercury

This set of procedures is suggested as a guide to be used if elemental (liquid) mercury is spilled on a hard surface (e.g., concrete, vinyl or ceramic tiled floors).

Be Prepared

- If you are in a workplace, instruct any employees working with mercury devices how to clean up a mercury spill.
- If you have a mercury cleanup product, such as zinc or sulfur powder, please get specific instructions from the manufacturer for its use in Step 9 below. Spill cleanup powders are recommended for concrete surfaces as they will bind mercury droplets that drop into holes in the concrete.

In the Event of a Spill

When mercury is spilled, it evaporates and gives off hazardous vapors that are invisible and odorless. If you spill mercury or break a product that contains mercury, it is important that it be cleaned up immediately.

DO NOT USE A BROOM OR A VACUUM TO CLEAN UP A MERCURY SPILL!

Materials You Will Need

- Disposable gloves
- Index cards or other stiff paper, such as from a cereal box
- Glass jar with screw-on metal lid or rigid plastic container with tight fitting lid (or sealable plastic bag, if other containers are not available)
- Sticky tape, such as duct, packing or masking tape
- Damp paper towel, wet wipe or mercury spill cleanup kit
- Desirable: string, tape or other material to delineate the spill area

Cleanup Procedures

1. Get all people not involved in cleanup out of the area to minimize tracking mercury into other areas.
2. Delineate the area that may have mercury droplets with string, tape or other materials. Be careful not to step in the mercury droplets.
3. Move all objects (e.g., furniture, boxes) away from the spill.
4. If possible, open a window or door to ventilate with outside air.

This information is available in alternate format. Contact Michelle Waters-Ekanem, Director of Diversity/Civil Rights at 617-292-5751.

TTY# MassRelay Service 1-800-439-2370

MassDEP Website: www.mass.gov/dep

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5. If the spill involves one pound of mercury (about two tablespoons) or more, you must report the spill to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) within two hours from the time when you became aware of the release. To report a spill, call the MassDEP Emergency Response spill line at 1-888-304-1133.
6. Remove all jewelry from your hands and wrists, since mercury bonds with most metals. Put on disposable gloves. Do not touch the mercury with your bare hands.
7. Use index cards or other stiff paper to push the mercury beads you can see together. Lift the mercury beads into a glass jar or rigid plastic container (two index cards may be used together to lift the beads). If a glass or rigid plastic container is not available, use a sealable plastic bag in the interim.
8. If there are small beads that you cannot get up with the stiff paper, you can pick them up with sticky tape.
9. Wipe the entire delineated area with a damp paper towel or wet wipe.
 - If you have a mercury spill kit with a treated sponge, use that to wipe the area, or
 - If you have a mercury spill cleanup product, such as zinc or sulfur powder, follow the specific instructions from the manufacturer for its use.
10. Place all used materials used to clean up (e.g., powder or paste, used sponge, tape, used paper towel or wet wipes and used disposable gloves) in the glass jar, plastic container or sealable plastic bag.
11. If you are using a sealable plastic bag, try to find a glass jar with screw-on metal lid or rigid plastic container with tight fitting lid as soon as possible to contain the plastic bag and contents. Mercury vapors will pass through a sealed plastic bag or loosely closed container and will contaminate the air of the room the container is in.
12. Label your container with "Hazardous Waste - Mercury Contaminated Spill Cleanup Materials" and the date.
13. Dispose of the container with spill cleanup materials through a licensed hazardous waste management firm. If you are a business and this is your only hazardous waste, contact the Department of Public Works or Health Department in your community to see if a household hazardous waste collection event has been scheduled. Many municipalities will allow you to pay a small amount to include your waste with theirs.