


The UNIVERSITY of WESTERN ONTARIO
Physical Plant and Capital Planning Services Division

POLICY:		NUMBER:
MERCURY CONTROL PROGRAM		S-10
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PREPARED BY:	AUTHORIZED BY:	CLASSIFICATION:
PP&CPSD	 D.V.B. Riddell	Safety Procedure
		EFFECTIVE:
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		SUPERSEDES:
		August 23, 1983

Elemental (metallic) mercury is not hazardous when confined within a closed system such as a manometer. However, should such an instrument shatter or develop a leak, the resulting spill could expose nearby personnel to high levels of mercury vapour, depending upon the amount spilled and the effectiveness of the area ventilation system. Repetitive inhalation in such a situation can result in mercury poisoning in the exposed individual.

Many campus labs and research areas have been replacing mercury-type instrumentation with equivalent or better non - mercury systems i.e. mercury replaced by coloured water in manometers. This form of control is encouraged by Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S).

ACCIDENTAL MERCURY SPILLS:

All spills of mercury (Hg) must be cleaned up immediately to minimize the introduction of the potentially harmful vapours into the workplace. Clean-up of such spills must be performed by OH&S or a qualified contractor. The recommended clean-up procedures will depend on the size and the extent of the spill. See instructions below.

1. Small Spill Clean-Up (i.e, thermometers, etc.)

- 1.1 Collect up all spilled mercury by using handy commercial kits, lab suction apparatus (aspirator), etc., and seal in a leak-proof container.
- 1.2 Gather other materials used in clean-up or having been in contact with mercury and seal in a 6 mil plastic bag.

2. Large Spill Clean-Up (i.e, greater than 2 ml.)

- 2.1 Ventilate area by using portable air exhaust units.
- 2.2 Contact Occupational Health and Safety immediately if assistance is required. A specialized mercury vacuum, respirators and a mercury vapour detector are available when required. In addition, Occupational Health and Safety can advise on the degree of hazard and other preventive measures to be taken.
- 2.3 Supervisors must complete an Accident Investigation Report.

3. Disposal

- 3.1 Contact Occupational Health & Safety for disposal of mercury or mercury related waste.
- 3.2 Ensure that all materials are tightly sealed in plastic and labeled according to instructions in the Hazardous Materials Management Handbook.

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LABORATORY PLUMBING MAINTENANCE: (Physical Plant Personnel)

If sinks or drain pipes are being removed or repaired in laboratories, precautionary steps must be taken before starting this job. Over exposures caused by using a torch to free the pipe joints can be prevented by the following steps below.

1. Always empty a sink trap by placing a suitable container under it.
2. Any mercury collected in this manner must be sealed tightly in a leak proof container preferably plastic.
3. Contact Occupational Health & Safety for proper disposal, see Large Spill Clean-up section above.