

FEDERAL FACILITIES MERCURY QUESTIONNAIRE

Mercury poses a serious threat to human health and the environment. Mercury is an element and once released to the environment is persistent and bioaccumulates, increasing its concentration in fish, bird, and/or animal tissue as it moves up the food chain. Advisories to limit consumption of certain freshwater fish have been issued in each of the New England states due to mercury levels. When mercury contaminated fish are consumed by pregnant women and children they can be at high risk. Methyl mercury can impair development of the nervous system of fetuses and in young children, affecting sensory, motor, and cognitive functions, resulting in such problems as difficulty in learning to read and inability to concentrate. Repeated exposure to elevated levels of mercury can cause neurological problems in adults as well. Although mercury enters the environment in a variety of ways, one of its primary sources is from disposing of mercury-containing items in the trash, particularly if that trash is incinerated.

Federal Facilities can play an important role in reducing mercury's environmental impacts by minimizing their use of mercury. Federal Facilities should identify where mercury can be found in their operations and ensure that mercury-containing products are properly managed. Instituting policies to minimize the purchase of unnecessary mercury-containing products is an important next step. This questionnaire and the attached inventory checklist can serve as useful tools to identify the locations and uses of mercury at your facility. With this information your facility can develop a baseline mercury inventory, identify areas to target for reduction and disposal efforts, and determine where to focus on improving purchasing and management practices.

Effects

- Do you feel your facility is aware of the environmental and health impacts of mercury? Yes No

Historical Questions

- Has your facility thought about conducting a mercury inventory? Yes No

- To what extent has your facility conducted a mercury inventory?

- How has your facility addressed mercury disposal in the past?

- To what extent has your facility conducted a clean-out of mercury-containing products?

Present Practices

- How do you address waste disposal of mercury-containing products?

- What products and/or processes may use mercury or mercury-containing products at your facility?
(Examples include analytical laboratory procedures, measurement, temperature, and pressure devices, and switches)

- How extensive is the chemical inventory for incoming and shelved mercury-containing devices?

- Do you manifest mercury-containing wastes? Yes No

- Do you feel your facility is aware of the Executive Orders pertaining to purchasing, waste minimization, recycling, and Greening the Government? Yes No

- Do you feel your facility is aware that fluorescent bulbs are now treated as a universal waste and can no longer be disposed of as a solid waste? Yes No

Purchasing Practices

- How do the purchasing procedures operate at your facility?

- To what extent do you impact the purchasing practices, choices, and decisions at your facility?

- Is there a policy in place to screen products? If not, are you in a position to adopt a policy?

- Does flexibility exist in selecting alternative products?
(For example, choosing a higher-grade alternative reagent with less mercury)

- Do you know where to get additional sources of information, including alternative products, case studies, and guidebooks?

Results

- Are you able to summarize the results of any actions that your facility has taken to reduce the use of mercury? For example, can you describe any changes that have been made due to these efforts, or do you have measures of mercury that has been reduced?