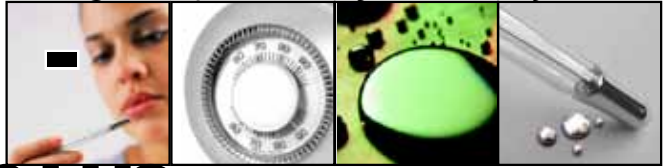


# Mercury Spills - Hiring a Cleanup Contractor



## Why is it important to clean up mercury spills right away?

Mercury is harmful to your health and your family's health. Items that may contain mercury can break. It is best to get rid of these items before they break.

If a mercury-containing household item breaks, mercury vapors get into the air. These vapors can remain in the air for a long time if not cleaned up properly.

Cleaning up spilled mercury should be done right. Large spills can be complicated and likely require a professional to assist in the cleanup, which can be expensive. Cleanup for mercury spills may not be covered by your insurance policy. Small spills can still be complicated and disruptive to you and your family. See the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) fact sheets "Mercury Spill Quick Guide" and "How to Clean Up Spilled Mercury," for more information about cleaning up spills.



## What if mercury does spill?

It is always best to safely remove mercury-containing items before they break or spill. Check out the MDCH fact sheets "Is Your Home Mercury Free?" and "Get Rid of Mercury Safely" for more information.

If mercury is spilled:

- Do NOT vacuum or sweep.
- Get people and pets out of the room.
- Open all windows and doors that go to the outdoors in the room where the mercury is spilled.
- Close all air returns, vents, and registers in the room.
- Cover the spill area with plastic.
- Close all doors that go to the rest of the house in the room where the mercury spilled.
- Isolate the area until cleanup crew arrives or cleanup is complete.

Call your local health department or the MDCH at **1-800-648-6942** for advice about your exact situation before you begin cleaning the spill.

## About Hiring a Cleanup Contractor

The State of Michigan does not certify or license companies specifically for mercury cleanup. MDCH does not endorse and cannot recommend any companies to do the work.



## How do I know if I need to hire a cleanup contractor?

### You can most likely do the cleanup yourself if:

- It's a **small spill** - like a thermometer.
- It happened in your home.
- You are not pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant within the year.







### You will need help if:

- It's a **large spill (or an unknown amount)**.
- It happened in a public area.
- You are a woman who is pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant within the year or a child.

## Do you know how much mercury has spilled?

Knowing how much mercury has spilled is helpful in determining whether you should hire a cleanup contractor.

Call your local health department or the MDCH at **1-800-648-6942** for advice about your exact situation before you begin cleaning the spill.

Common Item	Source of Mercury	Amount (Weight) of Mercury	Spill Risk (No spill risk if intact)	Need for Cleanup Contractor?
<b>CFL bulbs</b> 	Sealed in the bulb	Cannot be seen (about 4 milligrams); 100 times less than a thermometer	Very small if bulb is broken.	<b>No.</b> The amount is very small. For cleanup information, see the MDCH fact sheet "CFLs and Mercury".
<b>Thermometers</b> 	Sealed In the bulb of glass thermometers	Much less than 1/8 teaspoon (about 500 milligrams)	Small if mercury is not tracked around.	<b>Possibly.</b> If mercury is tracked around, the small amount of mercury becomes more difficult and this can turn into a large spill. Call your local health department or MDCH for guidance. You may also want to call a cleanup contractor.
<b>Thermostats</b> 	Sealed in the glass tilt switch	Less than 1/8 teaspoon (about 3,000 milligrams)	Small if tilt switch is damaged or broken.	<b>Possibly.</b> If the mercury is tracked around, the small amount of mercury become more difficult and this can turn into a large cleanup. Talk with your local health department or MDCH for guidance. You may also want to call a cleanup contractor.
<b>Barometers*</b> 	In the dial or glass tube	At least 1/2 tablespoon (more than 1/4 pound)	Large if dial, wheel, or glass tube is damaged.	<b>Yes.</b> This is a large and it can be tracked around. It is best to follow the MDCH "Mercury Spill Quick Guide" and isolate the area until you have talked with your local health department or MDCH and a cleanup contractor has arrived.
<b>Clocks*</b> 	As weights in the pendulum	More than 2 tablespoons (several pounds)	Large if pendulum is damaged.	<b>Yes.</b> This is a large and it can be tracked around. It is best to follow the MDCH "Mercury Spill Quick Guide" and isolate the area until you have talked with your local health department or MDCH and a cleanup contractor has arrived.
<b>Free-flowing Mercury*</b> 	A container or jar	Varies	Large if container is broken or open.	<b>Yes.</b> If there is unknown amount of mercury spilled, treat it like a large spill. Containers and jars have the potential to have a lot of mercury in them, so you should follow the MDCH "Mercury Spill Quick Guide" and isolate the area until you have talked with your local health department or MDCH and a cleanup contractor has arrived.

\*The release of a large quantity of mercury, such as a barometer or clock, or an unknown quantity should be reported to the National Response Center at [www.nrc.uscg.mil/nrchp.html](http://www.nrc.uscg.mil/nrchp.html).

## Guidelines for Selecting a Cleanup Contractor

Before you hire a cleanup contractor, consider asking the following questions:

### Have you dealt with a mercury cleanup before? What kind of mercury spill?

When you hire a cleanup contractor for a mercury spill, you want more than a general contractor. Preferably, you would want to choose a contractor that has experience with mercury spills. If you can't find a cleanup contractor that has worked on a mercury spill before, pick a cleanup contractor that has experience cleaning up hazardous materials.



### What type of equipment do you use?

Some equipment may not be sensitive enough to detect small amounts of mercury. Ideally, the contractor should use a mercury vapor analyzer. If the cleanup was done at a business, school or hospital, they should mention that they used the NIOSH 6009 method for after-testing.

The equipment used should be able to detect levels of mercury that are protective for your particular situation.

For more information on mercury vapor units, see the MDCH fact sheet "Mercury Vapor Quick Reference Guide".



### What units are you using for testing and the screening values?

The units that mercury is measured in are important. For instance, the Lumex RA915+ analyzer reports mercury concentrations in nanograms per cubic meter ( $\text{ng}/\text{m}^3$ ). The Lumex Lite reports concentrations in micrograms per cubic meter ( $\text{ug}/\text{m}^3$ ). It is important that the units of the screening values match the units reported by the machine.

You may also want to ask what screening values are being used. There are different screening values for residential settings and occupational settings.

For more information on mercury vapor units, see the MDCH fact sheet "Mercury Vapor Quick Reference Guide".

### What's your cleaning process?

Ask the contractor for an example of the cleaning process he or she used in a previous cleanup. They should mention that they:

- conduct screening of the area where the spill occurred;
- remove the contaminated items;
- perform any additional cleaning if conditions indicate it; and
- conduct screening of the area after cleanup is completed.

If the contractor is doing both the cleanup and the after-testing, consider having the local health department there as oversight.



### What credentials do you have?

The State of Michigan does not certify or license cleanup contractors for mercury. Some cleanup contractors may be certified as an industrial hygienist and have a Certified Industrial Hygienist (CIH). If your cleanup contractor claims to have this certification, check the credentials. The CIH is awarded from the American Board of Industrial Hygiene.



## Guidelines for Selecting a Cleanup Contractor, continued

### Do you have references of clients that had similar spills?

Ask the references:

- What specific services were performed?
- Did the contractor keep on task?
- Did the contractor perform any unnecessary services?
- Did the contractor achieve the appropriate screening values for re-occupancy?
- Did the contractor perform work within the agreed budget?
- What, if anything, would you have done differently?



### After the cleanup, ask for a written report

Make sure you ask for a copy of the report from the cleanup contractor. The report should detail what was done, where mercury was found, what was disposed of, screening level values and laboratory data from any after-testing.

A copy of the report may be needed for insurance purposes. Also, your local health department or MDCH may be able to assist with a letter or phone call to your insurance company.



## Find a Recycling Site Near You

Many Clean Sweep sites and community household hazardous waste collection centers accept mercury-containing items from the public at no charge. Remember it is best to recycle items with mercury.

To find a collection site near you, visit [www.michigan.gov/deqmercury](http://www.michigan.gov/deqmercury), [www.michigan.gov/cleansweep](http://www.michigan.gov/cleansweep), [www.Earth911.org](http://www.Earth911.org), or [www.michiganenergyoptions.org](http://www.michiganenergyoptions.org).



- Recycling sites are not able to take cleanup debris. To find out how to dispose of cleanup debris, call the Environmental Assistance hotline at **1-800-662-9278**.

## Want to learn more?

### For Public Health Questions

Contact the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) at **1-800-648-6942** or visit [www.michigan.gov/mercury](http://www.michigan.gov/mercury) for these other fact sheets:

- Mercury Spill Quick Guide
- How to Clean Up Spilled Mercury
- Mercury & Your Family's Health
- Mercury Spills & Your Pet
- Is Your Home Mercury Free?
- Get Rid of Mercury Safely
- Mercury and Electrical Work
- Mercury and HVAC Systems
- Mercury and Plumbing
- Mercury and Renovation/Energy Upgrade

Michigan Department  
of Community Health



### For Mercury Pollution Prevention and Recycling Questions

Contact the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) at **1-800-662-9278** or visit [www.michigan.gov/deqmercury](http://www.michigan.gov/deqmercury).

