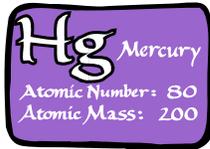


August 2008

RM News & Notes

Tip of the Week:



Things you Should Never Do with a Mercury Spill

Never use a vacuum cleaner to clean up mercury. The vacuum will put mercury into the air and increase exposure.

Never use a broom to clean up mercury. It will break the mercury into smaller droplets and spread them.

Never pour mercury down a drain. It may lodge in the plumbing and cause future problems during plumbing repairs. If it goes through the system, it may cause pollution of the septic tank or sewage treatment plant.

Never wash clothing or other items that have come in direct contact with mercury in a washing machine. The machine can be contaminated as well as pollution of the septic tank or sewage treatment plant. Clothing that has come in direct contact with mercury should be discarded.

Never walk around if your shoes might be contaminated with mercury. Contaminated clothing can also spread mercury around.

For more information about mercury and/or specific instructions about cleaning up a mercury spill, go to www.epa.gov/mercury

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Message from the Risk Manager

I was reading one of my *Consumer Reports* newsletters and it had a small article about the extra precautions needed to safely clean up a broken fluorescent bulb due to the small amount of mercury in the bulb. Maybe I'm the only one, but I didn't know that fluorescent bulbs contained mercury. Once we started researching, I was surprised at the number of consumer products that use this substance. I knew about things like some thermometers and barometers, but didn't realize there could be a problem with antiques such as pendulum clocks and mirrors. (The EPA website mentioned on the left gives a list of consumer products containing mercury.) I also didn't realize how toxic this substance is. While there is not any reason for panic, I do think we need to educate ourselves and take reasonable precautions. The information we've given you here touches the surface for some of the products that you are more likely to encounter but there is no way we could adequately cover this topic in the allowed space. Therefore, we've also included a couple of good websites that you can go to for additional information.

Darlene

MERCURY IN DENTAL AMALGAMS

What are fillings?

Teeth that have been affected by tooth decay (caries or cavities) require a filling. There are many different types of fillings, including:

- **Dental amalgams**

Dental amalgams, also known as silver fillings, are comprised of a mixture of mercury (45 to 50 percent), and an alloy of silver, tin, and copper (50 to 55 percent). When it is combined with other materials in dental amalgam, mercury's chemical nature changes and it is no longer considered harmful to the body.

Amalgam fillings made of mercury and other metals have been used by dentists for more than a century. They provide one of the most cost effective and longest lasting solutions. But their use has declined in recent years as doctors switch to resin composite fillings, considered more appealing because they are white.

Some advocacy groups and some dentists have long contended that the mercury in fillings can leach into the body and cause harmful neurological effects, including autism. Although the available evidence may not show any adverse neurological effects, if you are concerned about the possibility of exposure from amalgam fillings, talk to your dental professional about any risks and other options that might work better for you.

Just Facts

If not properly disposed, mercury can contaminate buildings, landfills, lakes, animals, fish, birds, humans, crops and rivers. In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency finally ordered waste handlers to treat fluorescent lamps as hazardous waste. With such a classification, fluorescent lamps are not to be sent to landfills, but instead are to be sent to recycling centers that break the lamps under special conditions and safely recover the mercury.

Household thermostats, diffusion pumps, antifouling paints, some batteries, some pesticides, contain mercury. Mercury, in its gas state, is used in mercury-vapour lamps and advertising signs.

Many years ago, hat makers used mercury to tan the animal pelts used in hats, and the exposure to mercury gradually caused mental and nervous disorders, frequently mistaken for insanity. This mercury exposure is precisely what created the old saying "Mad as a hatter".

FLUORESCENT LIGHTING SAFETY

Compact fluorescent light bulbs use about 75 percent less energy and last up to 10 times longer than regular incandescent bulbs. While fluorescent lighting is an efficient source of light, it does have some safety issues. Understanding these issues can help guide the selection of the best types of fixture, lamp and location that can avoid many of these issues.

Electrical Safety

When servicing fluorescent fixtures and lamps, electrical power to the entire fixture should be disconnected. This is not always practical in situations where a large number of fixtures are controlled from the same power control (such as in open office areas). In these cases, insulating gloves and a nonmetallic ladder should be used if the fixtures must be serviced when power is present.

Mercury Safety

All fluorescent lamps contain a small amount of elemental mercury (Hg) – about 1% of the amount found in old thermometers - also known as quicksilver. When lamps are cold, some of the mercury in the lamp is in liquid form, but while the lamp is operating, or when the lamp is hot, most of the mercury is in a gaseous or vapor form. Mercury vapor is a highly toxic substance, with an "extreme" rating as a poison. Even in liquid form, contact with mercury is considered life-threatening or a "severe" risk to health. Mercury can cause severe respiratory tract damage, brain damage, kidney damage, central nervous system damage, and many other serious medical conditions even for extremely small doses. Mercury poses an immediate risk only if the bulb breaks. If that happens, take these steps to avoid exposure to the metal, which is a potent neurotoxin: Open a window and leave the room for at least 15 minutes. Wear disposable gloves to clean up broken pieces, using a damp paper towel or sticky tape if needed. Avoid using a vacuum on hard surfaces, which can spread mercury into the air. Put remnants in a double plastic bag and discard in the trash outdoors (only as a last result). For burned-out bulbs, recycling is best. Go to www.epa.gov/mercury/consumer.htm for a recycling site near you.)

Breakage Safety

Fluorescent lamps have several hazards if broken. Depending on the type, there may be a partial vacuum or the lamp may be under pressure. Breaking the glass can cause shrapnel injuries, along with the release of mercury and other hazardous compounds. The biggest immediate injury threat from a broken lamp is from the phosphor-coated glass. If cut with fluorescent lamp glass, any phosphor that gets into the wound is likely to prevent blood clotting and will interfere with healing. Such injuries should be treated seriously and immediate medical attention should be obtained for people or pets that are cut. Medical personnel should be informed that the injuries were caused by a broken fluorescent lamp, and that mercury was present.

Up Coming Events

Each program is advertised by Risk Management and is available to employees of Columbia County Board of Commissioners and the city employees of Grovetown and Harlem. Additionally, the Defensive Driving Courses may be attended by immediate family members of employees, on a space available basis, for a nominal fee.

Pre-registration is required.

For additional information or to register contact Risk Management. 706-312-7475

Safety Review Board October 9, 2008

Defensive Driving
Course – 8 hour August 19, 2008
September 16, 2008
September 30, 2008
October 16, 2008

Defensive Driving
Course – 4 hour

CPR/AED/First Aid August 7, 2008
October 30, 2008

County Office Closed September 1, 2008

Newsy Notes

- Kids should use a sunscreen of SPF 15 or more.
- Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going out in the sun. Reapply every two to three hours. Don't forget nose, lips, ears and back of hands and feet!
- Remember, even dark-skinned children can get sunburned!
- Hats, visors and sunglasses keep kids from getting burned, especially during the brightest part of the day (10 a.m. - 4 p.m.).
- Kids as young as 6 months need to wear sun protection. Make sure to keep infants and toddlers out of direct sunlight.
- Water and white sand reflect more sunlight, making it easier to get burned. Kids should be extra careful at the beach!
- If a child gets sunburned, a cool -- but not icy -- bath will provide some relief.



AUGUST 2008

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OCTOBER 2008

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