

# MERCURY FACT SHEET

What is mercury?

Mercury is a naturally occurring metal found in the environment. It has many useful properties. A liquid at room temperature, it is sensitive to temperature changes. It also has disinfecting properties and is highly conductive to the flow of electricity.

Where can mercury be found?

Mercury enters the environment from sources like incineration, coal-fired power plants, mining and smelting of various ores, and the disposal of consumer products manufactured with it. It is most notably found in products such as thermometers, batteries, dental fillings, fluorescent bulbs, and electrical switches.

Why is mercury a problem in the environment?

Mercury released from air and water sources ultimately is transformed into methylmercury in lakes, rivers, and oceans. It bioaccumulates in the aquatic food chain making consumption of fish hazardous to those high on the food chain.

What are the health effects?

Mercury is a neurotoxin which slows fetal and child development and causes irreversible deficits in brain function. High exposure to mercury can result in shakiness, tremors, numbness in fingers and toes, loss of muscle control, memory loss, and kidney disease.

How is mercury harmful to fish?

Once in a lake or river, mercury is converted to methylmercury. Fish absorb methylmercury from their food and from water as it passes over their gills. Mercury is tightly bound to proteins in all fish tissue, including muscle. **There is no method of cooking or cleaning fish that will reduce the amount of mercury in a meal.**

How does mercury affect wildlife?

Eagles, osprey, loons, turtles, mink, otters, and other fish-eating creatures are at risk from eating mercury-contaminated fish. Mercury in their diets can cause early death, weight loss, and problems with their ability to reproduce. Unfortunately, wildlife cannot read fish advisories or change their eating habits in order to avoid mercury contamination.

What can I do to prevent mercury pollution?

Mercury is being phased out of many retail products and regulation regarding mercury use and disposal are becoming quite stringent. As a consumer, educate yourself, do not purchase mercury-containing items if a substitute is available. When an item containing mercury is purchased, dispose of it properly when it becomes waste.