

Mercury Spills

Mercury – Basic Information

Mercury is commonly used throughout the University in many technical and diagnostic procedures. When properly contained, it is of little threat to our health.

- Immediate attention to mercury spills is important because spilled mercury can accumulate over time resulting in exposure to mercury vapor.
- Broken thermometers that contain small amount of mercury may be safely collected in a container that can be sealed.
- Always wear disposable gloves when cleaning up mercury.
- Dispose of mercury and mercury contaminated waste through the chemical waste program.
- Anyone handling mercury or cleaning up mercury should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water when finished.

Mercury Spills

Mercury spill kits that include a sponge with a layer of granulated zinc on one side can be used to clean up small spills. The zinc fuses with the mercury as you clean.

- Don appropriate PPE.
- Gather all the droplets using a suction tube, syringe, or piece of paper.
- Get up as much mercury as possible.
- Store the spilled mercury in a **labeled** container.
- Put the sponge on the spilled mercury and/or the contaminated area – zinc side down.
- Move the sponge in clockwise circles from the outside working in toward the center.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for re-use and/or disposal of the zinc sponge.

For large mercury spills, call OH&S **immediately**.

Always wear the appropriate PPE when cleaning up spills!

Mad as a Hatter



In the 19th century, mercury was used in the making of felt hats. Back then, no one knew about wearing personal protective equipment so hatters handled the mercury with their bare hands. Some of the symptoms of prolonged exposure include: speech, hearing, vision, and mental impairment, trembling, and lack of coordination (mercury poisoning). While it is not verifiable, the term “mad as a hatter” may have come from the known fact that many hatters truly went mad or insane from handling mercury.

Alice in Wonderland

Others think the term may have its origins from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) from the Mad Hatter at the tea party.

No matter where the term comes from, we don't want you to experience the “Mad Hatter's” disease (mercury poisoning). Always wear the appropriate PPE when using or cleaning up mercury.



For more information or assistance, call OH&S at 934-2487.
For after hours emergencies, call 934-3411.