

Cleaning Up a Small Mercury Spill

Before you start to do a mercury spill cleanup!

At this point, you should have read the previous sections in this fact sheet that describe a small mercury spill, what you should do immediately after a mercury spill and what you need to know if you decide to do the spill cleanup yourself. The following section is a general step-by-step guide on how to clean up a small mercury spill. You should complete each of the following steps to recover the spilled mercury and remove the contamination. Any mercury not removed will continue to be a source of potentially harmful mercury vapors.

Ten Steps for Cleaning Up a Small Mercury Spill

1. Prior to cleanup, remove metal items like jewelry and watches since they can be permanently damaged by mercury. **Put on old clothes, old shoes and latex or vinyl gloves.** Put a clean change of clothes and shoes along with a clean trash bag in a safe place outside the contaminated area. You will change out of your old clothes and shoes and put them in the trash bag at the end of the cleanup.
2. **Identify items in the spill area that can be cleaned and those that cannot.** Non-porous surfaces (finished wood, plastic or concrete) can be cleaned following this guidance. Porous surfaces or fabric-covered items (upholstery, carpeting, stuffed animals, pillows, backpacks, unfinished wood, cork, cardboard) are difficult to clean because mercury beads may be trapped in these materials. If you decide you cannot clean these items, place them in plastic trash bags or cover or wrap them in a double layer of plastic and carefully seal with tape. Place the wrapped items in a secure place, preferably outdoors and out of the reach of children and pets. You should consult with a trained professional about how to decontaminate or dispose of these items safely.
3. **Wear gloves to carefully pick up the larger pieces of broken glass and what remains of the broken device and place them on a paper towel.** Gently fold the paper towel around these pieces so you can pick the bundle up and place it in a zipper-type plastic bag. **Use index cards or stiff cardboard** to push smaller pieces of glass and mercury beads together into a pile. **Shine a flashlight** at an angle to locate beads of mercury. The beads will reflect light from the flashlight. Check for mercury in cracks or in hard-to-reach areas where beads may be hidden or trapped. Check a wide area beyond the spill.
4. **Use the eyedropper to collect mercury beads and place them in the plastic bag.** Hold the eyedropper at an angle to draw the mercury into the tip. Keep the eyedropper at an angle to stop the mercury from rolling back out until you can put the mercury into the plastic bag. **Wrap tape (sticky side out) around your gloved fingers and carefully use it to pick up any remaining glass or beads.** Check again with the flashlight to be sure that no beads of mercury remain.
5. At this point, mercury beads may still be trapped in cracks or crevices on irregular surfaces. **Sprinkle sulfur powder over the contaminated area** and rub it gently all over the surface and into the cracks with a paper towel. Sulfur powder binds with mercury. Use a paper towel dampened with water followed by wiping with another damp paper towel to clean up the sulfur and mercury. Place the used paper towels in a zipper-type plastic bag.
6. **Put all the items that were used to pick up the mercury, including index cards or cardboard, eyedropper, contaminated tape, paper towels, and zipper-type bags into the trash bag.** Carefully remove rubber gloves by grabbing them at the wrist and pulling them inside out as they come off. Place the used gloves in the trash bag.
7. **Carefully seal the trash bag that contains the mercury contaminated waste** and put it in a secure place, preferable outdoors and out of reach of children and pets until it can be disposed of safely.

8. If possible, **open a window and use a fan to ventilate the area to the outdoors for 24-48 hours** before resuming normal use. If possible, heat the area (for example, with a space heater) while still ventilating to the outdoors. Avoid blowing the exhaust back indoors or into other nearby residences.
9. **Clothes or shoes that did not come in direct contact with liquid mercury should be removed and put into the trash bag** that was left outside the contaminated area at the beginning of the cleanup. Close the trash bag and take it outdoors. Carefully remove the shoes and or clothing from the trash bag and air them out thoroughly outdoors for 24 to 48 hours. After the outdoor airing, items that are washable can then be laundered.
10. **Dispose of contaminated items properly!** Mercury-contaminated items should not be placed in the regular household trash. New York State Rules and Regulations control the disposal of mercury-containing items and waste. Contact your town or county officials for information about hazardous waste disposal in your community. Contact New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Waste Determination and Analysis Section at (518) 402-8633 for information about the Rules and Regulations.

For more clean-up information, you can contact:

- **Your local health department** - Check the blue pages in your phone book
- [New York State Department of Health](#) - 518-402-7810 or 800-458-1158
- [New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Mercury Management information](#)
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Spills Hotline - (800) 457-7362
- [Your regional poison control center](#) - (800) 222-1222
- [US Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry](#) - (888) 422-8737
- [US Environmental Protection Agency - National Response Center](#) - (800) 424-8802