



# SAFETY ALERT

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No. 03-08

Mercury Hazards

MAY 2003  
Rev. March 2018

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Mercury was once a common component of thermometers and barometers, and was frequently used in a number of science experiments. Many people probably remember it as a “fun” substance used to amalgamate coins and jewelry.

Unfortunately, mercury is highly toxic and rapidly vaporizes into the environment when spilled. When the vapors are inhaled in large quantities, or in small quantities over a prolonged period of time, physical symptoms ranging from stomach ache and fever to vomiting and central nervous system disorders can result. Mercury is also poisonous when absorbed through the skin. As with most heavy metals, the effects of mercury on the human body are cumulative.

For these reasons, LAUSD banned the use of mercury compounds in 1986. However, many schools still have mercury-containing products and equipment (e.g., thermometers and barometers). In addition, students have occasionally brought mercury to school after obtaining it from an outside source.

In an effort to eliminate the mercury exposure hazard in our schools, the following actions should be taken.

**If you discover mercury-containing equipment at your school:**

1. Set the equipment aside in a secondary container in a location where it will not be disturbed.
2. Contact the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) at (213) 241-3199 for disposal.

**If a student brings mercury to school:**

1. The Site Administrator should confiscate the mercury and place it in a secondary container.
2. Confer with the student’s parent or legal guardian to determine if they wish to collect it.
3. If necessary, contact OEHS at (213) 241-3199 for disposal.

**In the event of a mercury spill:**

1. DO NOT attempt to clean up the spilled mercury. Evacuate/isolate the affected area, and call OEHS at (213) 241-3199.
2. Turn off the ventilation system and open windows to allow any vapors to evaporate.
3. If personnel were in direct contact with the spilled mercury, remove any contaminated clothing and wash exposed areas of skin with soap and water.
4. Contaminated items belonging to students should be stored in a sealed plastic or glass jar, and not returned until written authorization is received from a parent or legal guardian.
5. Do not enter or occupy affected rooms until after clean-up is completed, and clearance is provided by OEHS.
6. These types of spills are required to be reported to the California Office of Emergency Services. OEHS is responsible for making this notification that will likely result in a site visit by the Los Angeles County Fire Health Hazardous Division.

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DISTRIBUTION: All Schools and Offices