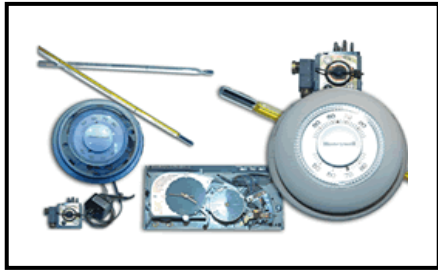


Cleaning Up Mercury Pollution From Thermostats

Mercury Thermostats Are A Major Source of Mercury in Products



- **Thermostats still hanging in Maine buildings collectively contain some 5,600 pounds of mercury.**ⁱ This is seven times the amount of mercury in all the auto switches left in cars manufactured before 2003 and eight times the mercury in thermometers still in use.ⁱⁱ
- In 2001, Maine passed a law to ban the sale and distribution of mercury-added thermostats (38 MRSA § 1661-C(5)) which went into effect January 1, 2006.
- Mercury is added to thermostats to make a “tilt switch,” typically a glass bulb containing inert gas and approximately **three grams of mercury**. One or more switches can be found in a thermostat.ⁱⁱⁱ Practical, economical alternatives to mercury thermostats are readily available.
- The mercury capsules in thermostats pose a threat to building occupants, particularly children, trash haulers and firefighters, as well as Maine’s air, water and wildlife.
- Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that attacks the brains of developing babies. When pregnant women or young children are exposed to methyl mercury it impairs childhood brain and nervous system development.^{iv} Mercury is also toxic to wildlife, and is linked to reproductive failure in species that consume fish, such as loons.^v

The Current Voluntary System for Collection of Thermostats is Failing

- In 2000, thermostat makers General Electric, Honeywell and White Rodgers established the Thermostat Recycling Corporation (TRC) that runs the recycling program in Maine.
- Under the TRC program, thermostat wholesalers volunteer to place bins where heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) contractors can drop off thermostats.
- Currently, less than 10% of the mercury contained in thermostats removed from buildings in Maine is turned in – **180 of every 200 pounds is lost**.

Contractors and Homeowners Need an Incentive to Turn in Thermostats for Recycling

- **180 pounds of mercury is discarded, landfilled or incinerated in Maine each year.**
- Incentives are needed to ensure that mercury thermostats removed from buildings are turned in to a collection center to be safely recycled.
- Incentives work: In 2004, King County, Washington conducted a successful pilot thermostat bounty program, but unlike Maine’s proposed bill, Washington’s pilot program was funded by tax revenues.

THE GOAL OF THE THERMOSTAT COLLECTION PROGRAM SHOULD BE TO EXCEED 90% RECOVERY.

Maine should adopt LD 1792, which is modeled after Maine’s mercury auto switch law and requires thermostat manufacturers to pay a \$5 bounty for each thermostat turned in at a collection center.

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ⁱ Maine DEP, A Plan to Improve the Collection of Mercury Thermostats.

ⁱⁱ Maine DEP, A Strategy to Reduce the Mercury Content of Products: Report to Joint Natural Resources Comm. 2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sass et al. 1994. Mercury Usage and Alternatives in the Electrical and Electronics Industries, EPA/600/R-94/047 pp. 24-25.

^{iv} National Research Council. 2000, Toxicological Effects of Methylmercury. National Academy Press, Washington DC.

^v MaineDEP, Mercury in Maine, Statewide Report. pp. 8-9 (2002)