



Policies and Procedures

Use of Mercury-Free Devices

Introduction:

Mercury and mercury-containing devices have historically been used in laboratories and shops to measure temperature, pressure, liquid density, and humidity. Other common sources of mercury include fluorescent bulbs and some electric switches.

To minimize health and environmental risks, items containing mercury must be handled safely and disposed of properly when damaged or no longer in use. Improper handling, breakages and spills may result in avoidable exposures and/or require extensive cleanup efforts.

Mercury spills from broken thermometers are the most common type of hazardous material cleanup on campus. Broken thermometers are also a source of potential mercury discharge to the sanitary sewer system. Spilled elemental mercury may hide within lab ovens and refrigerators and under benches. Mercury dumped into sink drains may accumulate in the drain and continuously emit vapors or be spilled during plumbing or construction work.

Policy:

It is ESF's policy to reduce health risks and prevent environmental pollution from elemental mercury by implementing a mercury-free purchase policy. Devices containing mercury will no longer be purchased or otherwise acquired. ESF will also eliminate elemental mercury and mercury containing devices wherever possible by identifying containers and replaceable apparatus, and assuring proper disposal. For devices and apparatus currently in use, the College will promote the use of non-mercury containing devices by coordinating a mercury device collection and exchange program. The Environmental Health and Safety Office will consider requests to contribute 50 percent of the purchase price toward replacements when mercury-containing devices are exchanged for devices that are mercury-free. Contact the Environmental Health and Safety Office at 315-470-6896 for more information.

A standard exception to this policy is the purchase of fluorescent light bulbs, which must be managed and disposed of in accordance with ESF's "Waste Light Bulb Recycling Guidelines" <http://www.esf.edu/ehs/lightbulb.htm>. Other exceptions to the mercury-free purchase policy may be granted provided the purchaser demonstrates the lack of a viable mercury-free alternative device or method to the Environmental Health and Safety Office. All purchase requests of this nature are to be forwarded to Environmental Health and Safety for review/prior approval before submitting to the Purchasing Department for procurement purposes. Any irreplaceable use of mercury must be done in a safe manner consistent with ESF's Laboratory Safety Guide and Chemical Hygiene Plan.



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All campus facilities must work toward becoming mercury-free by eliminating all non-essential mercury-containing devices and equipment. The Analytical and Technical Services Stockroom maintains an inventory of mercury-free thermometers. Other locations for examples of mercury-free alternatives that can be explored include Ever-Safe non-toxic thermometers (<http://www.ertco.com>) and Enviro-Safe non-toxic thermometers (<http://www.vwrsp.com/>).