



IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T “HERD”



Volume II, Issue I
March 2010

Sink Disposal Restrictions for Mercury

By Shaun Savage, Lab Support & Compliance Specialist

Over the years, the effects of mercury exposure on humans and the environment, primarily aquatic life, has been well documented. As a result, regulatory requirements from agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Environmental Protection, and Massachusetts Water Resource Authority have focused on eliminating mercury in our wastewater.

As a member of the Tufts community, and therefore applicable to the requirements surrounding mercury, the solution seems rather elementary; simply collect mercury containing products and ship off-site for disposal. Unfortunately, it is not that simple, as institutions throughout the commonwealth still struggle to maintain compliance. The reason for this is twofold. First, the limit for mercury in wastewater is currently 1 part per billion (ppb), which is extremely small. Second is that common products such as bleach may contain trace amounts of

mercury at levels below 1% which are usually not included on material safety data sheets (MSDS). As a result of these challenges, it is critical that everyone is cognizant of what goes down the drain.

In order to simplify the process, personnel should take the following precautions:

1. Review what is being poured down the drain. Remember, there are strict hazardous chemical waste regulations that require collection and off-site disposal of many chemicals; therefore, the number of items actually being considered for sink disposal should be minimal.
2. Review the material safety data sheet (MSDS) to determine if mercury is present. Remember, just because mercury is not listed on the MSDS, trace amounts could still be present.
3. Contact the vendor and request written documentation

that a product is mercury free. Vendor contact information should be located on the MSDS, original container label, or the vendor's homepage.

4. If you are still unable to document that an item is mercury free, review lists of common products that have undergone analysis. These lists are available through the EH&S Office.
5. Research suitable replacement products that have been documented as mercury free.
6. Last, if all else fails, collect the material as hazardous chemical waste. Pending volume, analysis may be conducted to determine the presence of mercury.

All questions can be directed to the Environmental Health and Safety Office (EH&S) at 617-636-3615.

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What? More Training!

By Stephen Larson, EH&S Director

Laboratory workers at UCLA and Texas Tech have recently sustained critical injuries while performing routine procedures. Other workers have been infected with Vaccinia in the laboratory. Last year, a NIST laboratory was closed for 12 months following a spill of a small amount of radioactive material.

Principal Investigators at Tufts must comply with 24 different safety codes, regulations, guidelines, standards and policies. New laboratory workers at Tufts may be required to attend as many as 10 courses!

All new employees must take both New Employee Orientation

and Laboratory Safety. Many will need Basic Radiation Safety and Biosafety in the Research Laboratory if they handle sources of ionizing radiation, human blood or infectious agents. Laboratory staff must not ship hazardous materials without formal DOT/IATA training.

Annual re-training is mandatory for persons handling radioactive materials, bloodborne pathogens or chemical waste.

There is a training schedule on the Tufts EHS website under Training.