

Mercury Spill

Description

Small Mercury Spill (i.e. broken Mercury thermometer)

- The preferred way to collect mercury is to dust the area of the spill with a mercury absorbing powder. This powder is available from several different manufacturers; the “PIG” brand product may be ordered [here](#). When used according to instructions, this powder will form a solid mercury-metal amalgam that is much safer and easier to handle than elemental mercury.
- Begin clean up at the outer perimeter of the spill and work towards the origin. Work carefully making sure not to miss any mercury, and note which areas have already been cleaned.
- Use an index card or rubber squeegee to gently collect the smaller beads and form a large bead that can be sucked up with a disposable pipette or amalgamated with mercury absorbing powder. Take care and use small careful strokes so as to maintain control of the mercury beads.
- Use a pipette to suck up the large mercury bead and place the pipette in a sealed rigid container. If using a mercury absorbing powder follow the manufacturer’s instructions for application and use. After the amalgam has hardened, it can be collected with a squeegee or stiff card and placed into the rigid container for disposal.
- Sulfur powder can be used to cover mercury and limit the movement of beads on smooth surfaces. Lightly apply a coating of sulfur to the spill area and use the same index card method to collect all mercury and excess sulfur. Do not breathe sulfur dust.
- Thoroughly inspect the spill area using a flashlight to help illuminate the smaller beads. Mercury beads will often be pinhead size, or smaller. Duct or masking tape can be used to pick up very small beads of mercury that you may find.
- Re-clean the spill site and perimeter if necessary. Pay close attention to cracks and crevices that may hide small beads of mercury.
- In the event that a vertical or overhead surface is contaminated it may be necessary to use mercury decontamination wipes or sponges
- When the area has been thoroughly decontaminated, place any sponges, used powder, rags, shoe covers, gloves, and anything used for the clean-up into a plastic bag for disposal. Do not mix these items with any free mercury you may have collected. Label the bag as hazardous waste indicating the solids are contaminated with mercury.
- Any portion of a broken thermometer collected as part of clean up should be placed into a plastic bag and the bag placed in a rigid unbreakable container such as a Nalgene bottle.
- Submit a [Chemical Waste Pick-Up Request](#) to arrange for disposal.

Large Mercury Spill (i.e. manometer or larger device)

- In the event that the size or the complexity of the spill precludes laboratory workers from using this procedure, evacuate and isolate the immediate area and contact Environmental Health and Safety’s Chemical and Radioactive Waste Disposal group at (352) 392-8400.