

What Never to Do with a Mercury Spill

- **Never** use a vacuum cleaner to clean up mercury (but see the "What to Do if a Fluorescent Light Bulb Breaks" section below for more specific instructions about vacuuming broken fluorescent light bulbs). The vacuum will put mercury into the air and increase exposure.
- **Never** use a broom to clean up mercury. It will break the mercury into smaller droplets and spread them.
- **Never** pour mercury down a drain. It may lodge in the plumbing and cause future problems during plumbing repairs. If discharged, it can cause pollution of the septic tank or sewage treatment plant.
- **Never** wash clothing or other items that have come in direct contact with mercury in a washing machine, because mercury may contaminate the machine and/or pollute sewage. Clothing that has come into direct contact with mercury should be discarded. By "direct contact," we mean that mercury was (or has been) spilled directly on the clothing. For example:
 - if you broke a mercury thermometer and some of elemental mercury beads came in contact with your clothing, or
 - if you broke a compact fluorescent bulb (CFL) so that broken glass and other material from the bulb, including mercury-containing powder, came into contact with your clothing.
 - You can, however, wash clothing or other materials that have been exposed to the mercury vapor from a broken CFL, like the clothing you happened to be wearing when you cleaned up the broken CFL, as long as that clothing has not come into direct contact with the materials from the broken bulb.
- **Never** walk around if your shoes might be contaminated with mercury. Contaminated clothing can also spread mercury around.

• What to Do if a Fluorescent Light Bulb Breaks

- Compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) are lighting more homes than ever before, and EPA is encouraging Americans to use and recycle them safely. Carefully recycling CFLs prevents the release of mercury into the environment and allows for the reuse of glass, metals and other materials that make up fluorescent lights.
- Fluorescent light bulbs contain a very small amount of mercury sealed within the glass tubing. EPA recommends the following clean-up and disposal guidelines:
 - **Before Clean-up: Ventilate the Room**
 - Have people and pets leave the room, and don't let anyone walk through the breakage area on their way out.
 - Open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes or more.

- Shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system, if you have one.
- **Clean-Up Steps for Hard Surfaces**
 - Carefully scoop up glass fragments and powder using stiff paper or cardboard and place them in a glass jar with metal lid (such as a canning jar) or in a sealed plastic bag.
 - Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
 - Wipe the area clean with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes and place them in the glass jar or plastic bag.
 - Do not use a vacuum or broom to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces.
- **Clean-up Steps for Carpeting or Rug**
 - Carefully pick up glass fragments and place them in a glass jar with metal lid (such as a canning jar) or in a sealed plastic bag.
 - Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
 - If vacuuming is needed after all visible materials are removed, vacuum the area where the bulb was broken.
 - Remove the vacuum bag (or empty and wipe the canister), and put the bag or vacuum debris in a sealed plastic bag.
- **Disposal of Clean-up Materials**
 - Immediately place all cleanup materials outside the building in a trash container or outdoor protected area for the next normal trash.
 - Wash your hands after disposing of the jars or plastic bags containing clean-up materials.
 - Check with your local or state government about disposal requirements in your specific area. Some states prohibit such trash disposal and require that broken and unbroken mercury-containing bulbs be taken to a local recycling center.
- **Future Cleaning of Carpeting or Rug: Ventilate the Room During and After Vacuuming**
 - The next several times you vacuum, shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system and open a window prior to vacuuming.
 - Keep the central heating/air conditioning system shut off and the window open for at least 15 minutes after vacuuming is completed.