

Proper Disposal

Thermostats

A Guide to Doing it right in Lawrence and Mercer Counties



If you have a central heating, cooling or HVAC unit in your home, you have a thermostat installed for regulating the indoor air temperature. Some thermostats contain mercury and when they are no longer needed, it's important they are properly disposed.

Do all thermostats contain Mercury?

No. Most thermostats containing mercury are manual thermostats, meaning they have dials or levers that you need to adjust when you want to change the temperature inside your home. Most older thermostats contain mercury, however these are being phased out in favor of environmentally friendly and more effective models, such as electronic programmable thermostats. If you have a thermostat with a digital readout, it probably doesn't contain mercury.

To determine if your thermostat contains mercury, remove the cover and look for a clear glass bulb, also known as a glass ampoule, containing a silvery liquid inside. This sealed glass bulb is called a mercury switch and is nestled among the mechanics and wiring beneath the cover. The silvery substance inside of the bulb is mercury.

In Pennsylvania, the sale and installation of mercury thermostats is now prohibited due to its highly toxic nature. The recycling of mercury thermostats is required by law and it is illegal to dispose mercury thermostats in solid waste or your trash.

Is Mercury dangerous to human health and the environment?

Mercury thermostats are safe as long as the mercury inside of the unit is contained. A mercury thermostat holds 3 to 12 grams of elemental mercury. When mercury thermostats are discarded with everyday trash, it is likely that the glass bulb within the thermostat will break and release the mercury.

Mercury exposure in children and adults can result in neurological and behavioral issues, kidney toxicity, digestive tract issues, and lung issues. It can be fatal if inhaled or ingested. When mercury is released into the environment, it bioaccumulates in shellfish and fish.

How do I get rid of a mercury-containing thermostat?

Mercury-containing thermostats are recyclable.

In 2008, mercury thermostat collection legislation was passed in Pennsylvania requiring manufacturers to establish collection programs for contractor and consumer-generated mercury thermostats. The legislation also requires HVAC wholesale distributors with facilities in Pennsylvania to act as a collection point for waste mercury thermostats.

The Thermostat Recycling Coalition (TRC) is one of the easiest and cheapest way to comply with Pennsylvania Law. To participate in the TRC program, bring your mercury-containing thermostat to any TRC collection location for proper disposal. Visit the TRC website at www.thermostat-recycle.org to search for your nearest drop-off location. There are over 250 Collection Locations currently in Pennsylvania.

Many Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection events and operators also collect mercury and mercury-containing thermostats. There is generally a cost associated with these options.



Recycling/Solid Waste Department