Mercury Spills

Cleanup and Safety

Elemental mercury is a shiny liquid. It is silver-white in color and is found in some thermometers. Exposure to elemental mercury vapor is toxic, especially to children and infants. It can be easily tracked into your home if not cleaned properly. If you have ANY doubts when cleaning a spill of any kind in your lab, please call UGA’s Environmental Safety Division @ 706-542-5801.

NEVER touch mercury with bare hands.
NEVER use a vacuum cleaner to clean a mercury spill.
NEVER use a broom to clean a mercury spill.
NEVER use household cleaners to clean a mercury spill.

Cleaning Equipment
A commercial mercury spill kit is a helpful addition to any lab. If a commercial mercury spill kit is not available, the following is sufficient:
- Neoprene/latex/nitrile gloves
- Cardboard, stiff paper, or squeegee
- Plastic dust pan
- Zip-shut bags & trash bags
- Eyedropper
- Wide-mouth plastic container
- Sulfur powder and zinc or copper flakes
- Duct tape
- Paper towels
- Flashlight

- Keep lab personnel away from the spill area.
- Shut doors and vents around spill to prevent spreading contamination.
- Remove any contaminated clothing before exiting spill area.
- Place contaminated clothing in plastic bags with other mercury waste.
- Contain spill by digging the surrounding area with rags.
- A thin trail of water from a “Squeeze ‘n Squirt” bottle will contain mercury as well.

Hard Surface Spills
- Wear gloves when cleaning spills.
- Turn lights off in the area and use a flashlight held parallel to the ground to spot mercury beads.
- Using cardboard, stiff paper, or squeegee, push mercury beads together and sweep into dust pan.
- Using eyedropper, suction up mercury left behind and place in dust pan.
- Carefully place mercury in zip-shut bag.
- Sprinkle sulfur powder on spill area.
- A color change from yellow to brown means mercury is still present.
- Sprinkle zinc or copper flakes on area, wet, and collect any mercury that remains.
- Wipe up waste with paper towel.
- Pick up remaining beads with tape.
- Place cleaning media in zip-shut bags.
- Place bags and other waste into plastic container and label “Hazardous Waste.”
- Process waste through Chematix.

Sink Spills
- Wear gloves when cleaning spills.
- Remove as much water as possible without disturbing mercury.
- Suction mercury from bottom with eyedropper and empty into zip-shut bag.
- Place bag and supplies into plastic container and label “Hazardous Waste.”
- Process waste through Chematix.

Carpet Spills
Please contact the UGA Environmental Safety Division for mercury spills on carpet.

Please remember: If you have ANY doubts when it comes to cleaning a spill, call the UGA Environmental Safety Division @ 706-542-5801.