

Mercury is hard to resist. Its quicksilver motion is dazzling. But NEVER, NEVER:

- ✗ Touch it.
- ✗ Smell it.
- ✗ Heat it.
- ✗ Put it in your mouth.
- ✗ Vacuum it up.
- ✗ Run contaminated clothes through the dryer.

The vapor is very dangerous to inhale.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ➔ Warn children of the dangers of mercury poisoning.
- ➔ Contact your local Poison Control Center if you find uncontained mercury.
- ➔ Call your local Health Department for more information.

Office of Emergency and Remedial Response

EPA
March 1995

9285.7-24
PB95-963502
EPA-540-K-95-001

NTISPR-1014



United States Environmental Protection Agency
5201G
401 M Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20460



Printed on recycled paper

540K95001

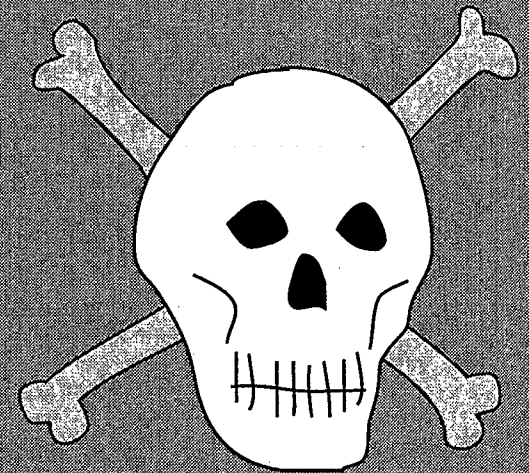
WARNING

It's dazzling...

It's slick...

It's awesome...

It's MERCURY...



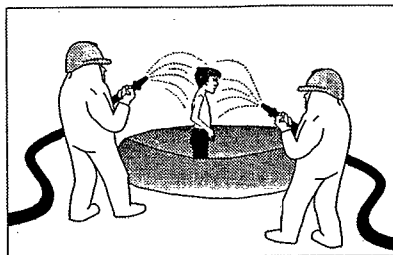
...and it can kill you!!

Florida Children Play Dangerous Game with Mercury

August 1994—More than 500 students in Belle-Glade, Florida were contaminated with liquid mercury after three boys found four jars filled with the silvery metal in an abandoned van. The boys brought the jars of mercury to school and passed it out to their friends. The children were fascinated by the silvery, liquid metal. "You ever seen 'Terminator II?' asked a 14-year-old boy, "When the bad guy melts into the ground? That's just what it's like." The students played with the mercury, rubbing it on their teeth, throwing it at each other, dipping their jewelry in it, and pouring it into a local canal. Many children took home samples in paper cups and bags.

Although inhaling mercury vapor is by far a more serious threat than swallowing liquid mercury, local officials were very concerned. "If the children ate small

amounts, that is not likely to be toxic," a local pediatrician stated. "The problem is going to come if the mercury is spilled or if it stays in a child's pockets. When it is



Florida children decontaminated by emergency workers after mercury exposure.

vaporized and inhaled, it can be very, very toxic." Initial symptoms include a cough, breathing difficulty, and chest pain. Vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and nerve or kidney problems may develop later.

Hundreds of children had to be decontaminated. The local hazardous waste materials team, dressed in yellow safety suits, stood the children in a wading pool, hosed their arms, and scrubbed their skin with brushes. Doctors at area hospitals were on call 24 hours-a-day for several days to examine children and adults exposed to the mercury and to give free blood tests. More than 20 homes had concentrations high enough to be of concern to the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Families had to be evacuated while EPA decontaminated these homes.

A hospital spokesperson said that he did not think any children had come in contact with enough mercury to cause any serious damage. No permanent damage to the children is expected.

Mercury Spill Forces Students Out of Dorms

November 1994—Over the Thanksgiving break, college students at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida removed liquid mercury from one of the school's laboratories. Although the laboratory manager noticed the missing chemical when he returned on Tuesday morning, he did not report it to authorities until mercury was discovered spilled inside and outside of a university dormitory. Students living in the dormitory were evacuated and housed in a local hotel while the dormitory was decontaminated. Potential short- or long-term damage is unknown.

Fool with mercury and you may experience:

- * coughing
- * shortness of breath
- * chest pain
- * vomiting
- * diarrhea
- * fever
- * mouth sores
- * kidney problems
- * loose teeth
- * impaired judgement
- * memory loss
- * sleeplessness

even death!

Midwest Boy Suffers Acute Mercury Poisoning

Spring 1994—A young boy in Moline, Illinois may suffer nerve damage due to mercury poisoning. The child brought home liquid mercury from the school science room and played with it in his basement. He spread the silvery liquid on his arms and legs in an attempt to look like the Tin Man from the *Wizard of Oz*. The home was so contaminated that the family was evacuated for nearly 10 months while the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) cleaned up the spilled mercury. Carpeting, clothing, and belongings were removed. Ceiling tiles and the air conditioning and heating systems also were replaced. Although the boy is now recovering, the extent of permanent damage is unknown.

Test Your Mercury Knowledge

1. Mercury is found in:
 - a) batteries
 - b) school laboratories
 - c) medicines
 - d) all of the above
2. Mercury is dangerous when:
 - a) spilled
 - b) in a thermometer
 - c) played with
 - d) in a laboratory
3. Mercury poisoning can cause:
 - a) birth defects
 - b) central nervous system damage
 - c) kidney damage
 - d) all of the above
4. If you spill mercury, you should:
 - a) vacuum it up
 - b) call the Poison Control Center
 - c) panic
 - d) wipe it up with a cloth
5. Of the following, what is the smallest amount of mercury which can cause a person to suffer some symptoms?
 - a) one gallon
 - b) one ounce per full
 - c) half a teaspoon
 - d) three tons