EH&S Fast Facts

MERCURY SPILL CONTROL

Mercury is a silver liquid metal that vaporizes at temperatures as low as 10° F. The colorless and odorless mercury vapor may cause toxic effects when inhaled. Most health effects result from constant exposure with symptoms of inflammation of gums/ mouth, excessive salivation or metallic taste, and tremors, particularly of the hands. The symptoms of acute exposure are bronchitis, cough, chest pain, and irritability.

Evaluate the Spill
- Call EH&S immediately during normal business hours or 9-1-1 after hours for large spills (broken manometers)
- Small spills (broken thermometers) must be cleaned promptly by laboratory personnel

Emergency Action (Large Spill)
- Notify others and evacuate everyone - close doors and wait outside the door for Hazard Materials responders
- Eliminate the spreading of mercury vapor by preventing people from walking through
- Short-term exposures to low level mercury vapors present little hazards and respirators are usually not required

Clean-Up
- Large spill: UCR EH&S will respond with trained HazMat personnel, personal protective equipment and a specially designed mercury vacuum
- Small spill: must be cleaned immediately - a lab coat, disposable gloves, and shoe covers must be worn to prevent skin absorption or contamination of clothing
- The best way to collect mercury is to use an index card or rubber squeegee to form a pile that can be sucked
- Beads of mercury can be sucked with a disposable pipette, a water-trapped vacuum line attached to a disposable pipette or a hand-operated vacuum pump
- Mercury-absorbing powders, if available, can be used to compound mercury
- Mercury waste and materials used in spill cleanup must be placed promptly in a sealed bottle or in a double layer of plastic bags and labeled for disposal as hazardous waste
- Don’t sweep with a broom or use a regular vacuum under any circumstances (will disperse mercury into the air and spread the contamination)
- After all visible mercury has been collected, the area must be washed with a detergent solution, rinsed, and allowed to dry before use (removes most mercury residue)
- Submit a hazardous waste pickup request using the EH&S online request, fax to 827-5122 or mail to EH&S Attn: Integrated Waste

Visit www.ehs.ucr.edu for additional information or call EH&S at 827-5528 if you have any questions.