



Proper Management of Waste Mercury Thermostats

You replace a lot of thermostats, but how much consideration do you give towards proper management of the ones that contain mercury? Many states now regulate the disposal of mercury thermostats and even more are considering it. Fines for improper disposal or costs associated with mercury spill cleanup can be extraordinary—as much as \$300,000 for a single incident. Therefore, proper management of waste mercury thermostats is the right thing to do and can save you from making a costly mistake.

Risks of Mercury Exposure

Mercury thermostats contain between 3 and 12 grams of elemental mercury and are likely the largest reservoir of mercury in homes today. In its various forms, mercury can be harmful to human health and the environment. While thermostats are not a significant source of mercury pollution, they are an easy one to control.

Consumers are now much more aware of the dangers of mercury. They expect their contractors to be responsible by recycling mercury thermostats instead of throwing them in the trash, or even worse, leaving them behind on the premise for the customer to deal with. It appears much more professional when the contractor is the one who handles the proper disposal of the mercury thermostat. Therefore, it is important to train your staff on the proper management of waste mercury thermostats.

Legal Issues Governing Management

The management of mercury-containing devices is regulated by state and federal authorities. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has the legal authority to respond to mercury releases. The Superfund law also gives the EPA the authority to identify the party responsible for the release, order those who improperly handle mercury to take appropriate response, and/or compel them to pay for a cleanup.

Many states have already enacted or are considering enacting legislation regarding the proper disposal of waste thermostats. For example, legislation has been introduced and passed in 18 states banning the sale/installation, regulating the disposal, and/or mandating the collection of waste mercury thermostats.

Currently nine states require all HVAC wholesale distributors to serve as collection locations. Additionally, many states specifically require the contractor who removes mercury thermostats from service to recycle them properly.

Easy Recycling Solution

Managing waste mercury thermostats can be a hassle and expensive, particularly for small HVAC contractors. Old mercury thermostats have no residual value and hazardous waste firms can charge upwards of \$15 each to properly dispose of a thermostat. Unsure of what to do with them, some contractors still toss them in the trash or keep them in a big box in the corner of the shop (likely in violation of the law).

Luckily, the non-profit Thermostat Recycling Corporation (TRC) offers contractors an easy and free recycling solution. In 1998, Honeywell, White Rodgers, and General Electric voluntarily formed TRC to address the proper end-of-life management of waste mercury thermostats. Supported by 31 manufacturers and over 3,600 HVAC collection points in 48 states, TRC works to make it as easy and low-cost as possible to properly dispose of mercury-containing thermostats.

TRC offers two simple solutions for contractors to recycle mercury thermostats. The first solution is to bring mercury thermostats that have been removed from service with you on your next trip to your HVAC Wholesaler. Then, they will take them and recycle through the program. If you find that your local distributor isn't participating in this program, ask them to start.

The second easy solution is to directly sign-up your HVAC contracting firm to participate in TRC's program, which is a more common option for larger firms. If you have seven or more technicians, and/or are located in a rural area, you are eligible to participate in TRC's program directly. There is a one-time participation fee. After the initial fee there is no additional cost and participants can ship in the bin as many times as necessary. TRC includes all materials needed to make collection and shipping as easy and safe as possible.

It really is that simple to properly dispose of mercury thermostats, it just takes a little help some times. **IE3**



Author's Notes

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Online Extras



For more information on the management of waste mercury thermostats, visit <http://ie3media.com/trc>.

Want to know if there is pending mercury thermostat legislation in your state? ACCA members can follow what legislation is pending in their state at <http://ie3media.com/stateleg>.