



News Release

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Ecology and partners divert 12,000 pounds of mercury from environment; Don't toss that fluorescent bulb! Take it back!

OLYMPIA – Today, Earth Day, Department of Ecology Director Jay Manning announced that the combined efforts of businesses, schools, trade associations, local governments, nongovernmental organizations, and volunteers have prevented more than 12,000 pounds of mercury from entering the environment in Washington over the past five years.

At a news conference, Manning also addressed how to help solve a modern frustration: what to do with burnt-out, energy-saving compact fluorescent light bulbs and lamps. Fluorescent lights contain small amounts of mercury, a toxic material. That's why it's important to recycle them rather than throw them in the trash.

Locations exist in all regions of the state to take in fluorescent lights. To find out about locations nearest you, visit Ecology's Recycle Webpage (<http://1800recycle.wa.gov/>) or call the toll-free Recycle Hotline at 1-800-RECYCLE (1-800-732-9253).

Manning recognized the efforts of a number of Ecology's partners to keep people and the environment safe by recovering mercury waste and recycling mercury-containing products.

Fluorescent lights – which use one-quarter the energy of standard light bulbs – represent the next step in Ecology's statewide campaign to prevent mercury releases.

“From a climate change perspective, we love these high-efficiency light bulbs. However, fluorescent bulbs contain a small amount of mercury. To prevent mercury exposure for ourselves and the environment, we must all do our part to recycle fluorescent lights and make sure they do not end up in the garbage,” Manning said.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, if every American replaced just one light bulb with a fluorescent bulb, it would save enough energy to light more than 3 million homes for a year, more than \$600 million in annual energy costs, and prevent greenhouse gas emissions equal to more than 800,000 cars.

And sales are booming, as consumers use the spiral “curly bulbs” to make homes and living more convenient. These lights represented 20 percent of the market in 2007, up from just 11 percent in 2006, according to the EPA.

However, a recent Ecology study revealed that only 20 percent of fluorescent bulbs and lamps are properly recycled.

“That’s 8 out of 10 lamps that end up in dumpsters and landfills where the mercury can be released into the environment. We can do better! I want us to get to 100 percent recycling by 2015,” Manning said.

He announced that Ecology has awarded a Public Participation Grant to the Product Stewardship Institute and the Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation to conduct a series of stakeholder dialogues to help develop a product stewardship fluorescent lighting recycling program for Washington state.

Manning said he expects the partners to deliver initial results from these dialogues later this year and provide them to the Legislature for consideration in the 2009 session.

Also speaking at the Earth Day news conference about the successes and challenges of keeping mercury out the environment were:

- Washington State Rep. Sam Hunt, D-Olympia
- Gail McLendon – President, McLendon Hardware
- Suellen Mele -- Program Director, Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation
- Lauren Cole – Northwest Product Stewardship Council
- Robert Stolarski – Director of Customer Energy Management, Puget Sound Energy

Ecology also recognized the following fourteen “Quicksilver Champions” who have played critical roles in helping meet the milestone goal of reducing toxic mercury in the environment of Washington state.

- AAA Washington – *auto switch replacement program*
- Automotive Recyclers of Washington - *automotive switch recycling program*
- Spokane Regional Solid Waste System – *300 pounds collected in 2006*
- Gail Savina – *individual leadership*
- Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County – *leadership in mercury reduction efforts*
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction – *school cleanout programs*
- Rep. Sam Hunt – *legislative leadership on mercury reduction*
- Small Scale Miner Community – *mercury collection events*
- Walla Walla County, Public Works Department – *300 pounds collected in 2007*
- Washington Air Conditioning Contractors of America – *contractor thermostat collection*
- Washington State Dental Association – *dental office reduction efforts*
- Washington Retail Association – *mercury-containing products compliance assistance*
- Washington State Hospital Association – *hospital mercury reduction efforts*
- Washington Toxics Coalition – *environmental advocacy and citizen education*

In addition, Ecology recognized “Quicksilver Partner” organizations that are participating in mercury reduction programs throughout the state.

Ecology has been tracking mercury reductions as part of the Mercury Chemical Action Plan and under the state Mercury Education and Reduction Act (MERA) passed in 2003. Washington state has taken a leadership role through MERA to control mercury-containing products to reduce risks to communities. Mercury-containing products can lead to contamination when thrown in the trash, where they might be crushed or incinerated.

Washington reduces mercury - 3 of 3

Mercury can evaporate into the air where it can then be deposited into water and soil. Fish accumulated mercury in their bodies. This in turn can be a source of mercury exposure to people who consume the fish. Children and fetuses are the most vulnerable to the effects of mercury. Exposure can affect learning and behavior later in life.

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Ecology's mercury website: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/mercury/>

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