

Mercury-Thermostat Recycling and the Spring Shoulder Season

As the spring shoulder season moves into high gear, many industrial building and apartment managers take on projects to update their facilities. One task that typically moves to the top of the list is regulating and setting the indoor temperature to match the time of year.

Results of a 2009 survey, conducted by the International Facilities Management Association (IFMA), titled [Temperature Wars Savings vs. Comfort](#) cite that office employees and tenants complain most about the temperature being too hot or cold.

To ensure acceptably consistent temperate and greater energy efficiency, upgrading heating and cooling thermostats is a punch list priority. However, before installing any newer devices, safe and compliant removal of older stock, specifically products that contain mercury, is a must.

What's on the Inside Matters

Mercury can be found in various devices, including thermostats manufactured before 2007, in older residential and industrial buildings. Housed safely in a glass ampoule, exposure to mercury is limited and, for many years, was the gold standard for product endurance.

However, when a mercury-containing product breaks and the mercury is spilled, the exposed mercury can evaporate and become an invisible, odorless toxic vapor. To prevent mercury releases, these products should be used and stored safely, and managed properly at the end of their useful lives. That's where an extended producer responsibility (EPR) program comes in.

Safe Removal and Recycling of Mercury-Containing Thermostats

In 1998, long before EPR legislation concerning mercury-containing thermostat collections was passed, the [Thermostat Recycling Corporation \(TRC\)](#) began as a voluntary effort by manufacturers who felt duty-bound to take back the devices in the safest, most proactive way possible.

According to TRC's newly-released [annual reports](#), the program's largest collection locations were from HVAC industry, followed by Hazardous Household Waste (HHW) facilities. Mandated by law in many states, these locations have a TRC green bin on the premises so that customers, contractors, and

homeowners can turn-in their out-of-service mercury thermostat. During the 2016 calendar year, TRC diverted 183,595 mercury-containing thermostat equivalents from the waste stream thanks to these efforts.

Today the 31 manufacturer-member organization boasts a network of more than 3,000 collection sites nationwide, and has recovered over 2.1 million thermostats, or 10 tons of mercury, to date. All costs to transport and properly dispose of recovered thermostats are assumed by TRC

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New Containers Options Make Collections Easier

Since its inception, TRC has distributed large, green recycling bins to fulfill statutory requirements and accommodate the high rate of mercury thermostat returns nearly 20 years ago.

However, based on the most-recent data, the average number of thermostats returned per bin in the US has declined drastically since 2006. While the traditional large bins are still available, TRC recently rolled out a new, one-gallon pail offering to reflect the new normal.

Just in time for the spring shoulder season, each small pail holds a maximum of six thermostats. For just \$10 per container, collecting and recycling are much more convenient and keep mandatory collection channels compliant with their state's law.

To order a standard green bin or new one-gallon pail, visit thermostat-recycle.org or call 1-888-266-0550.

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