

Title: Flu Season and Fever Thermometers
From: Isabella County Recycling Center – MRF
Author: Stephanie Carroll
Date: 11.30.2009

The flu and cold season is upon us and we have been reminded to cough into our sleeve, stay home when we're sick, and to wash our hands frequently. When we start to feel under the weather we often times reach for a fever thermometer to check our temperature.

Before you use that thermometer though, check and make sure it does not contain mercury. Thermometers sold today are now mercury free, but it is not uncommon to have a mercury thermometer still in the medicine cabinet. If you have recently bought a thermometer, it is safe to assume that it does not contain mercury. Michigan banned the sale of mercury thermometers in 2003.

The Environmental Protection Agency warns that mercury causes health effects when it is breathed as a vapor where it can be absorbed through the lungs. Mercury thermometers pose a direct risk when they are broken or improperly disposed. Research has linked exposure to many health problems including impaired hearing, kidney disease, and infertility.

A simple way to avoid mercury exposure is to remove mercury thermometers and other devices from your home. To determine what type of thermometer you have simply look at the color of the bulb and thin line. If it is silver it contains mercury. Newer thermometers usually have a red or orange bulb and are called "alcohol thermometers." These are a safe alternative and give accurate readings. More recently digital thermometers are being used and are also a safe option. Keep you and your family safe and take a few seconds to check your thermometer.

We want to give you an opportunity to remove mercury thermometers from your home before they have a chance to break. Double bag the thermometer in two sealable plastic bags and turn it in at the front desk as the Recycling Center. We accept mercury and all mercury containing devices during normal business hours.

In the event a mercury thermometer should break open windows and turn off any heaters. Cleaning methods vary depending on the type of surface. Contact the Recycling Center or the Michigan Department of Community Health at 1-800-MI-TOXIC for recommended clean-up options and referrals. Visit www.epa.gov/mercury for more information.

[Stephanie Carroll is the Project Manager at the Isabella County Recycling Center – MRF and can be contacted at scarroll@isabellacounty.org]