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Mercury in Automobiles

This guidance document has been produced by the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) to assist in identifying mercury containing materials in cars and how to properly dispose of those materials.

Mercury Switches

Mercury switches are often found in older vehicles that used them to operate trunk and hood lights, antilock braking system (ABS) systems, antitheft systems, and in some airbag systems. In 2003, nearly all automobile manufacturers stopped using mercury switches in new cars.



The object on the left is a mercury switch. The center object is a ball bearing switch that contains no mercury. Dime shown for size comparison.

Each mercury switch contains approximately 1.2 grams of liquid mercury. The switches are usually easy to locate and can be removed in a couple minutes. Depending on the make and model of the vehicle, the entire housing or sensor will need to be removed to access the mercury switch. A ball bearing switch can be identified by the sound of the ball bearing rattling when the switch is shaken.

Mercury switches should be removed before vehicles are crushed or sent to a metals recovery facility such as an electric arc furnace steel mill. Mercury left in auto scrap can be released to the environment in steel mill smelting operations.

Other Mercury-Containing Devices

High Intensity Discharge (HID) lamps contain a small amount of mercury and should also be removed from a vehicle before being crushed or smelted. Older navigation displays often have cold cathode

fluorescent lamp (CCFL) backlights that contain mercury vapor. The lamps or entire display should be removed before being crushed or smelted.

How to Dispose of Mercury-Containing Materials

Mercury-containing materials should be managed as mercury-containing items using the Universal Waste Rules in Nebraska [Title 128 – Hazardous Waste Regulations](#), Chapter 25. See the NDEE Guidance Document titled "Universal Waste Regulations" for more information on managing universal waste.

If the mercury-containing materials are not managed as universal waste, they must be managed as hazardous waste. A waste service provider will be needed to properly dispose of the materials.

RESOURCES:

- NDEE Home Page <https://dee.nebraska.gov/>

Contacts:

- NDEE Main Number (402) 471-2186
- NDEE Toll Free Number (877) 253-2603
- NDEE Hazardous Waste Compliance Assistant (402) 471-8308
- Email questions to: NDEE.moreinfo@nebraska.gov

NDEE Publications:

- Environmental Guidance Document – “Universal Waste Regulations”
Guidance documents are available on the NDEE Home Page under “Forms”, “Publications, Grants & Forms”.
- [Title 128 – Nebraska Hazardous Waste Regulations](#)
Titles are available on the NDEE Home Page under “Resources and Services”, “Laws & Regulations”, “Rules & Regulations”.

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