

This guidance document is advisory in nature but is binding on an agency until amended by such agency. A guidance document does not include internal procedural documents that only affect the internal operations of the agency and does not impose additional requirements or penalties on regulated parties or include confidential information or rules and regulations made in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act. If you believe that this guidance document imposes additional requirements or penalties on regulated parties, you may request a review of the document.

06-227

Revised 07/2025

## Mercury in Automobiles

This guidance document has been produced by the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (DWEE) 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 DWEE 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:**

- DWEE Home Page <https://dwee.nebraska.gov/>

## **Contacts:**

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

## **DWEE Publications:**

- Environmental Guidance Document – “Universal Waste Regulations”  
*Guidance documents are available on the DWEE website by clicking “Visit Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (DEE),” selecting “Forms,” and “Publications, Grants & Forms.”*
- [Title 128 – Nebraska Hazardous Waste Regulations](#)  
*Titles are available on the DWEE website by clicking “Visit Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (DEE),” selecting “Resources and Services,” “Laws & Regulations,” and “Rules & Regulations.”*

---

*Produced by: Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment, 245 Fallbrook Blvd. Ste.100, Lincoln, NE 68521; (402) 471-2186. To view this and other information related to our agency, visit our website at <https://dwee.nebraska.gov/>.*