






EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY
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MEMORANDUM

To: Deans
Healthcare Unit CEOs
Vice Presidents
Department Heads

From: Brendan McCluskey, JD, MPA 
Executive Director

Renee Lyons, MPH 
Director, EOHSS

Through: Denise V. Rodgers, MD 
Provost

Kathleen W. Scotto, PhD 
Vice President for Research

Re: Mercury Restriction Directive

Date: April 27, 2009

In 2004, the University entered into a Consent Agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to eliminate the use of mercury on the Newark Campus; the expectation of the Agreement was that the ban would eventually be extended to all other UMDNJ campuses. Therefore, pursuant to that Agreement and its intent, the University is mandating that schools/units eliminate mercury in all applications, including research, clinical, and facility settings. In the event that no reasonable substitute is available, the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety Services (EOHSS) will consider granting an exception to this directive; any such decisions will be at the discretion of the Director of EOHSS, in consultation with the Vice President for Research and other appropriate UMDNJ officials.

Even though the use of mercury-filled thermometers has been discouraged at UMDNJ laboratories for years, mercury spills, usually the result of a thermometer breaking in a water bath or heating block, are the most common hazardous material incident in UMDNJ research laboratories. Mercury-filled sphygmomanometers are another common source of this hazardous material. Therefore, as of May 30, 2009, mercury thermometers must be replaced with non-mercury-containing thermometers in all UMDNJ laboratories; likewise, mercury sphygmomanometers must be replaced with non-mercury-containing devices.

Mercury spills are both costly and disruptive to the University's operations. Elemental mercury is volatile at room temperature. When mercury spills from a broken device, it forms droplets that can easily roll and accumulate in floor cracks, behind base coving, and under furniture and other

objects, occasionally requiring these items to be moved to allow a clean-up of the materials. Mercury vapor is odorless, colorless, and tasteless. Inhalation of vapors is the most serious route of exposure for mercury.

It can take several hours to clean up simple spills, and disposal of the clean-up materials for a single mercury thermometer spill costs hundreds of dollars per incident. The cost of decontaminating an incubator or other piece of equipment can be several thousand dollars and can render the equipment unusable.

Most mercury sphygmomanometers and thermometers in UMDNJ clinics and laboratories have already been replaced with non-mercury units. With this directive, the University is formalizing the program to eliminate the use of mercury wherever possible. This directive is also being implemented to enable the establishment of procedures to ensure that new mercury-containing devices are not brought back into the University after they have been replaced.

Any mercury-containing devices that need to be disposed of or taken out of service should be disposed of through EOHSS. Contact your campus EOHSS office to arrange for disposal or if you have questions; contact information is posted at: <http://www2.umdj.edu/eohssweb>. The Office of Emergency Management and Occupational Health and Safety (EMOHS) is working to build a safe, healthful, and resilient University community through collaborative partnerships, with everyone doing their part to accomplish this goal.