

# Mercury

## IN LOCAL WATERWAYS



### What is Mercury?

Mercury is a heavy metal commonly found in items such as thermostats, thermometers, fluorescent lights, some cosmetics, certain car parts, batteries and more. Mercury has been used for industrial processing, mining, treatment of hides, and even for medical purposes. For a more complete list see *Mercury in Consumer Products | US EPA* Mercury doesn't break down; it lasts for centuries in the environment.



### Why is Mercury Toxic?

A process called Methylation, changes inorganic mercury to organic mercury (methylmercury). Most mercury is atmospherically deposited through the air as inorganic mercury. This inorganic mercury can interact with other compounds by movement through the atmosphere and become methylmercury through a complicated chemical process. Methylmercury can bind with soil which is carried to streams through erosion. Organisms such as algae ingest mercury and in turn are consumed by fish. The heavy metal is then consumed by species higher on the food chain, including humans. Methylmercury is the most common organic mercury compound found in the environment, and is highly toxic. This substance is retained in fat and muscle tissue of fish, shellfish, humans, and other organisms.



### What you can do?

Check your local recycling providers for information on recycling products that contain mercury.

Home improvement projects such as gardening, landscaping, and construction may all disturb soil. Make certain no loose soil or mud reaches sidewalks or streets where it can be washed into the stormwater system.



**OREGON HEALTH AUTHORITY MAINTAINS FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORIES**  
**IN GENERAL, HEALTHY ADULTS SHOULD EAT NO MORE THEN 4 MEALS OF NATIVE FISH PER MONTH**

*Oregon Health Authority: Advisories and Guidelines: Fish and Shellfish Consumption: State of Oregon*