

Spills and Safety

When mercury spills in a school or in a home, there are several possible outcomes--none of them pleasant. The health of children or students can be endangered. School may have to be closed up to several days during cleanup. Cleanup costs can strain already strained budgets. Liability issues can raise their ugly heads and a lawsuit or two may even be headed in your direction.

You may believe that the occasional broken thermometer in science class or student handling of elemental mercury are essentially harmless--but think again in light of the above concerns, which have plagued many schools. Mercury spills at students' homes can also be serious and what gets spilled at home may be brought to school, either knowingly or unknowingly. Couldn't happen in your school or community? Check out mercury case studies by using the [Mercury Map](#) and clicking on various states. Keep in mind that these are spills that have been reported--who knows how many spills go unreported?

Some Important Questions to Ask and Answer

- Have you had a mercury spill(s) in your school?
- Are you sure that you would know if there had been a spill?
- Which staff are responsible for mercury spill management or cleanup?
- Are there [mercury spill kits](#) in all rooms that contain mercury?
- Is staff trained in how to use these kits?
- Do you know the do's and don'ts of [proper mercury spill management](#)?

Let's take a quiz!

What would you do if mercury spilled on the floor in your school?

- a) gather it up and put it in the sink drain
- b) sweep it onto a rigid piece of paper, then put it in a sealable plastic bag
- c) vacuum it up, then place the vacuum bag in the garbage
- d) any of the above are OK
- e) a, b or c will all make a bad situation worse

The correct answer is **e**. If you are going to continue to use elemental mercury, mercury thermometers or other equipment containing mercury it is critical that staff understands [proper spill management](#) techniques.