Mercury

PHYLLIS CARTER

Mercury is a chemical element with a variety of unique and useful characteristics for researchers but it is also a known neurotoxin with sometimes severe effects to humans, and toxic to fish and wildlife, just ask the Mad Hatter.

Discharge of mercury to our waste water system is prohibited. This is enforced by the MWRA, at a level of 0.001 mg/L or 1 ppb. MIT has recently had repeated instances of discharges above this level at different monitoring locations at the Cambridge campus. To help raise awareness, the EHS Office needs the help of the entire MIT community to identify potential sources of mercury to waste water and eliminate this discharge or handle the waste in an alternate manner.

The following may be helpful to enlist and assist EHS coordinators, reps and other members of the community.

The EHS Office coordinates the mercury equipment exchange program to swap out mercury thermometers and other equipment. Evaluate your lab or DLC if you have known mercury or mercury compound usage.

Where's that mercury hiding? Mercury is also found in many materials at levels below 1%, the required disclosure level on a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) and may be at levels below standard assays. There are many sources of mercury used at the Institute. The EHS office has identified categories of products that contain mercury.

Lastly, you can Identify mercury-bearing substances, chemical reagents, and other commercial products that may be in use within your facility. Database links and lists for mercury containing products are provided for MASCO (database sponsored by MASCO, MA OTA, MWRA and Harvard); for Dana Farber, for MGH and U.S. EPA.

Contact the EHS office at (617) 452-3477 or your local EHS coordinator for assistance.
Electronic & Universal Waste Management

NIAMH KELLY

Spring is just a glimmer of hope at this point in January, but I find myself already doing some spring cleaning. As I clean out my kids’ playroom and go through cards and closets to see what can be thrown out or donated, I’m amazed at how many things contain batteries and have plugs. If you’ve been at MIT for a while, you’re well aware that most electronic items can’t simply go in the trash; rather, they should be recycled due to hazardous contents. For those who are new or might have forgotten, it’s worth reviewing what the program is here on campus.

Within the Department of Facilities, the Recycling Program has an established process for safely collecting and recycling all required materials including standard items such as paper, plastics, glass and cardboard, as well as electronic and technology related waste items of all sizes. In fact, Facilities will safely remove any item that’s 50 lbs or less from your office or lab for free. Check out their website for a full list of items that can be recycled at no cost to you. If you’d like to read more about this topic, please refer to the EHS Winter Newsletter article from 2009.

Can You Believe What Almost Happened!!

PAULA DUFFY

MIT’s Environment, Health and Safety Management System (EHS-MS) supports and reinforces OSHA’s health and safety initiatives and requirements. Many are familiar with OSHA’s injury and illness reporting requirements. It is also important to know that OSHA recommends “near miss reporting and investigation.” A near miss is an incident that does not result in injury or property damage, but might have. An example is a waste container that ruptures in a fume hood at night due to a bad chemical mix.

The MIT EHS Office recommends near misses, including those involving students, be reported to PIs or Supervisors. To investigate, determine who, what, when, why and how to identify the causes and contributing factors, and develop a plan to prevent future occurrences. Contact the EHS Office for assistance at 617-452-3477.

As a reminder, PIs and Supervisors must report all accidents/incidents involving injury or illness using the on-line Supervisor’s Report of Occupational Injury/Illness tool. For details, see the Occupational Injury or Illness web page.

Spotlight SECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The Security and Emergency Management Office (SEMO) was created in July, 2007. The vision for the creation of SEMO was founded on the desire to construct a clearing house for issues related to security systems, card access services, duress buttons, pre-employment background screening, video camera use and emergency management services. SEMO is a service organization providing a central repository for critical services that intersect in both scope and functionality, but were previous-ly managed by independent groups within the Institute. In the almost five years since the formation of SEMO (which started as a three person organization) additional responsibilities include management of the MIT Key Office (key requisition/authorization process) and the MIT Card Office. SEMO continues to grow and currently employees 9 people (eight full time and one temp). Stop by their HQ (N52-419) for more information and an opportunity to say hello to our neighbors at SEMO.

Questions? Comments? We’d love to hear from you!
Please email environment@mit.edu