

CO-27

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## Collection and Recycling of Mercury Thermostats

For many years, thermostats used internal mercury tilt switches. The average mercury thermostat contains about 3 grams of mercury, compared to a fever thermometer that has about 1 gram. Mercury thermostats represent an estimated discarded 53 to 112 pounds of mercury being discarded in New Hampshire every year, often in the solid waste stream. Over the past two decades, manufacturers have developed mercury-free digital thermostats.

When mercury-added products like thermometers, thermostats and fluorescent lamps are discarded in trash that is incinerated, mercury is emitted during combustion. The 2001 passage of RSA 149-M:53 prohibited the *sale* of certain mercury products, including fever thermometers and “novelty items” (toys, games, ornaments), and banned the use and purchase of mercury in schools; and the 2007 passage of amendments to RSA 149-M:53 prohibited the sale of most mercury-added measuring devices, thermometers (other than fever), switches, relays and thermostats. Also in 2007, the Legislature passed RSA 149-M:58 that bans the *disposal* of all mercury products, including all thermostats, in residential and industrial solid waste. In 2008, the Legislature enacted a mandatory thermostat recycling program. In addition to prohibiting the installation of mercury-added thermostats, there are three main components of the law:

- 1) Thermostat **manufacturers** must develop or provide a mercury thermostat collection and recycling program as well as outreach and education to increase thermostat recycling.
- 2) Thermostat **wholesalers** must serve as collection points for out-of-service mercury thermostats and provide information to contractors about the recycling program.
- 3) **Contractors or service technicians** responsible for removing mercury-added thermostat as a result of new construction, renovation, maintenance installation of a new heating or cooling system, or any similar activity must remove the thermostat from the premises and recycle or properly dispose of the thermostat as a hazardous waste. (Note: disposing of the mercury thermostats as a hazardous waste is a much more expensive option than recycling as described below.)

### Thermostat Collection and Recycling

For a one-time fee of \$25, the Thermostat Recycling Corporation (TRC) offers collection, transportation and recycling of out-of-service mercury thermostats. The fee covers the cost of the bin, return mailing costs and thermostat recycling costs. When the bin is filled and returned, TRC automatically provides replacement bins, free of charge, for as long as the purchaser participates. This program satisfies the manufacturers’ obligations under RSA 149-M:58-a , and provides a convenient and inexpensive way to wholesalers and contractors to comply with the law as well. Many transfer stations also have TRC bins.

Bins can be ordered three ways: online at <http://www.thermostat-recycle.org/>; by phone at 1-800-238-8192; or by e-mailing TRC at [trc@thermostat-recycle.org](mailto:trc@thermostat-recycle.org).