



Safety Tip of the Week

Mercury in Fluorescent Light Bulbs

Mercury (Hg), also known as “quicksilver,” is a liquid at room temperature but easily evaporates into a gas. Fluorescent tubes and lightbulbs contain varying amounts of mercury vapor and liquid mercury. When a tube or bulb breaks or is crushed, easily-inhaled toxic vapor is released into the air. Such vapor requires proper PPE and training to clean it up safely.



Health Effects and Symptoms

Workers can be exposed to mercury from breathing mercury vapor or from skin contact. The central nervous system and the kidneys are especially sensitive to mercury. Signs of mercury poisoning include effects on mood/demeanor, impaired memory and coordination, and skin irritation/allergic reactions. Signs of exposure to higher levels of mercury include coughing, chest discomfort, difficulty breathing, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, sore gums, eye irritation, severe tremors and changes in behavior or vision.

Cleanup Action Plan

Workplaces where fluorescent bulbs are deliberately crushed or broken should have a cleanup plan in place. Such a plan should provide workers with the necessary tools and PPE for cleanup and the necessary training about mercury exposure and its prevention.

PPE for Mercury Cleanup

Only trained cleanup workers wearing the proper PPE should clean up mercury bulb breakage. The level of PPE required depends on the size of the spill. PPE for mercury cleanup can include chemical-resistant gloves, splash-resistant coveralls or gowns, and eye protection. Cleanup supplies include a mercury spill kit with an eye dropper, cardboard, plastic bags, mercury absorption powder, mercury sponges, and waste bags for disposal of contaminated items. Additionally, it is useful to have warning tape to put around the area of the break. Remember NEVER to use a broom to clean a broken mercury-containing lightbulb!

BE CAREFUL...AROUND MERCURY!