

The Driving Force Behind Mercury Reduction Initiatives at NIH

We would like to recognize the efforts of CAPT Ed Rau (retired), CAPT Michelle Evans, CAPT Ed Pfister and Kenny Floyd to develop the mercury reduction programs that help make NIH safe. Please join us in thanking these individuals, along with the many others who supported these efforts! Also, we would like to wish CAPT Ed Pfister a happy retirement beginning this month!

Mercury regulation began at NIH in 1970 with specific requirements for the disposal of mercury and mercury compounds. As knowledge about mercury grew, the NIH realized it would need to further restrict the use of mercury to ensure safer working environments and to minimize potential damage from mercury accidents. In addition, the NIH recognized many years ago the threat that mercury could pose to both NIH employees and the surrounding community if left unregulated. There were many initiatives that were launched to increase awareness and educate our community about dangers of mercury, a few of which are listed below:

Year	Mercury Reduction Initiatives
2001	NIH initiated a voluntary agency-wide campaign to switch to mercury-free alternatives or to use options with as little mercury as possible. While this campaign was successful at reducing mercury use, spills were still a concern. The NIH sought to formally restrict the purchase of mercury to make sure mercury was only being used when absolutely necessary.
2003	The NIH Policy Manual Chapter 3033 was established to prevent mercury acquisition and use when unnecessary and to ensure proper use and disposal of mercury and mercury-containing items in the cases when it is needed. This policy requires an exemption to purchase any item that contains 100 ppb or more mercury. The “Mad as a Hatter” campaign (inspired by the effect chronic mercury use had on hat-makers) was launched alongside Chapter 3033 to improve the awareness of mercury hazards and to provide information on proper mercury disposal.
2018	The NIH continues to promote, educate, and increase awareness among staff on the acquisition, disposal and handling of mercury through newsletters, events (Green Labs Fair, America Recycles Day) and meetings.

As an agency dedicated to improving human health, it is crucial that we properly manage mercury throughout its entire lifecycle. These programs have played a large role in making NIH safer in regards to mercury use and we encourage all staff to further utilize them to make NIH even safer!