

Mercury Amnesty Day at Twinbrook I, II, III (NIAID) Facilities April 16 and 17, 2012

The Division of Environmental Protection (DEP) conducted a Mercury Amnesty Program for the collection of mercury items at the NIAID Twinbrook I, II, and III facilities in Rockville on Monday, April 16 and Tuesday, April 17. DEP staff visited all labs on these two days to safely collect and facilitate the proper disposal of mercury-containing items or mercury compounds. The NIH incurs significant costs for cleanup and disposal of mercury and related contamination. It is the policy of the NIH (see [Manual Chapter 3033](#)) to prohibit all unnecessary acquisition of mercury, mercury related products and compounds to reduce risk, protect workers' health and the environment, and comply with applicable regulations.

Since implementation of the mercury policy in 2008 we continue to find legacy mercury items and compounds in NIH laboratory spaces which have resulted in spills of mercury, primarily from broken thermometers. Spills increase the potential for exposure and environmental releases and may result in extremely high clean-up costs and liability.

The policy provides exceptions and procedures for obtaining variances and exemptions for necessary scientific and medical uses of mercury. NIH policy also requires use of mercury to be registered and approved by the ORF Division of Environmental Protection. Similar Mercury Amnesty Programs will be offered at other NIH locations in the future.

Summary of Facts

- The mercury amnesty event for Twinbrook was initiated due to recent spills from a broken Hg thermometer. This event was fully supported by the NIAID Scientific Director.
- A global e-mail from the NIAID Scientific Director was sent to NIAID Twinbrook staff announcing the amnesty event.
- DEP staff placed Mercury Amnesty Day "Not Wanted" Posters in all three buildings a week before the event.
- DEP staff also distributed a flyer about the event and [NIH's Mercury-Free Campaign](#).
- DEP Staff visited all labs in TWN I, II, III on April 16th and 17th to speak about the program with individual researchers and to collect any mercury thermometers or other mercury-containing items or compounds
- DEP staff collected 16 mercury thermometers, one mercury-containing UV bulb, and one bottle of mercury-contaminated Celite.
- Thermometers and other mercury items were packaged by the chemical waste services for shipment to a mercury recycler.