



Vermont Legislative Research Shop

Mercury

Mercury, an element that comes from both human-made and natural sources, acts as a nerve toxin that may impair the way humans see, hear, walk, and talk (EPA, 1997). "The US EPA has already finalized emission limits for municipal waste combustors and medical waste incinerators. As a result by the year 2000 emissions from these categories will decline at least 90% from 1995 levels"(EPA, 1999).

Mercury can be found in four different forms:

- Mercury metal, which is a silver-gray liquid, is harmful to humans when it is exposed into the air and consequently breathed into the lungs.
- Methylmercury "may be taken into the body by eating certain saltwater and freshwater fish, especially larger fish at the top of the food chain, such as shark, swordfish, large mouth bass, and chain pickerel."
- Inorganic mercury compounds can be found in batteries, over the counter drugs, ointments, nasal sprays, and some herbal medicines. These compounds may be harmful if breathed or swallowed.
- Phenylmercury can be found in latex paints (made before 1991), exterior and oil based paints, caulks, eye area cosmetics, and toiletries. Phenylmercury can be breathed in vapor form, passed through the skin, or swallowed

(NJ Department of Health, 1998).

Where?

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