



RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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RRWA Environmental Column – May 2007

Mercury Pollution Prevention

Did you know that mercury is found in many common household items and is highly toxic? Human activities, including coal burning, mining operations, and the use of mercury in consumer, medical, and dental products, have increased the amount of mercury in many parts of the environment including the atmosphere, lakes and streams. When mercury enters the environment, it can be altered from its metallic form to an organic form. This organic mercury (known as methylmercury) is then readily able to become part of the food chain when it is taken up by tiny aquatic plants and animals, which are eaten by larger fish, and those fish by even larger fish. During this process, known as bioaccumulation, the level of methylmercury builds up in the larger fish. As a result, mercury concentrations in large fish can be much higher than that of the surrounding water.

Eating mercury-laden fish is the primary way that people are exposed to this toxic pollutant. Mercury consumption poses a serious health threat since mercury can affect the central nervous system and interfere with fetal development. As a result, fish consumption advisories due to mercury bioaccumulation have been issued for rivers, lakes and other water bodies throughout the United States. In fact, several water bodies within the Russian River watershed have been identified as being impaired for mercury under the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) and there is some data to suggest that mercury is bioaccumulating in fish in the Russian River watershed.

So what can you do to prevent mercury pollution? Just make sure to properly dispose of all mercury products. Thermometers, fluorescent lamps, thermostats, and batteries are among the most common household products that contain mercury. While these products have many beneficial uses, mercury can be released into the environment during use or disposal of such products. Since these products contain mercury, it's illegal to throw them in the garbage, so be sure to recycle them by taking them to the Sonoma County Household Toxics Facility; see <http://www.recyclenow.org/> for details.

This Spring, the Russian River Watershed Association (RRWA) and the City of Santa Rosa are making it easier for you to prevent mercury pollution by holding several mercury thermometer exchange events. Just bring your old mercury thermometer and trade it in for a new digital thermometer! These events are sponsored in association with the Sonoma County Waste Management Association (SCWMA) and will be held at four Community Toxics Collections from May through July. You can bring in any number of mercury thermometers for exchange without an appointment. However, if you would like to bring other



types of household hazardous wastes for disposal, you must make an appointment by calling 1-877-747-1870. Please place mercury thermometers in two plastic zipper bags to prevent spills. In addition to these events, the City of Santa Rosa is also sponsoring thermometer exchange events this spring. The dates and times of all thermometer exchange events in Sonoma County are listed below.

Please come and participate in our events to help prevent mercury pollution and protect our watershed!

Sonoma County Thermometer Exchange Events

- May 14 from 10am - 5pm in Rohnert Park at the Rohnert Park Senior Center (6800 Hunter Dr, Ste A). Sponsored by the City of Santa Rosa, for more information call 707-585-6780.
- May 22, 4pm – 8 pm, in Cloverdale at the Train Station (504 Asti Road)
- June 5, 4pm – 8 pm, in Santa Rosa at the Veterans Hall (1351 Maple Ave)
- June 19, 4pm – 8 pm, in Windsor at the Windsor Town Corporation Yard (8400 Windsor Road, Building 100)
- July 10, 4pm – 8 pm, in Rohnert Park, at the Community Center (5401 Snyder Lane)

Mercury Fever Thermometer Exchange



Bring us your glass mercury fever thermometer and exchange it for a digital thermometer.*

FREE



See <http://www.rrwatershed.org/mercury.html> or www.recyclenow.org for more information.

The Russian River Watershed Association (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of eleven cities, counties and special districts in the watershed that are working together on programs for clean water, fisheries restoration and watershed enhancement.