FACT SHEET

Appropriate Use and Disposal Practices
Household Mercury

CITY of Statesville NORTH CAROLINA

Public Utilities Department - Water Resources - 704-878-3438

ABOUT MERCURY: It is a versatile, natural element, traditionally used in many products and various processing applications. If handled properly, mercury can be beneficial and safe; however, if handled improperly, even small amounts of mercury can be harmful to humans and wildlife.

MERCURY CONTAINING DEVICES (MCDs): older thermometers, thermostats, switches, light bulbs which contain elemental mercury or mercury vapor.

RISKS: the vapor from broken or discarded fluorescent bulbs can contaminate air, surface water and groundwater. Mercury in the air eventually settles into water, or onto land where it can be washed into water. Certain microorganisms can change it into methylmercury, a highly toxic form that builds up in some types of fish and shellfish which is the main source of exposure to humans. Advisories are issued to women who are or may become pregnant, nursing mothers and parents of young children about how they should eat certain types of commercially caught fish and shellfish. Because high levels of mercury can affect the brain, heart, kidneys, lungs and immune system of humans of all ages, mercury disposal is regulated by state and federal laws.

PROPER DISPOSAL: MCDs are prohibited from being disposed of in municipal solid waste collection facilities and landfills.

Mercury-Containing Thermostats are regulated as universal waste. Proper management can be found at www.deq.nc.gov and search on "mercury".

Lights Containing Mercury (LCM) include fluorescent, ultraviolet, neon, and high intensity discharge lights that contain mercury vapor and should not be discarded with regular waste. Recycle spent fluorescent lights:

⇒ Take advantage of free recycling programs offered by retailers and electric cooperatives. See the list at www.epa.gov/cfl

⇒ Participate in Iredell County Solid Waste's twice yearly Household Hazardous Waste Collection events. Call 704-878-5430 for dates.

BREAKAGE OR SPILL FACTS: Immediate action is required when a mercury release occurs or if a MCD is damaged. Details on proper and controlled clean-up can be found at www.epa.gov/hg/spills or call Poison Control at 800-222-1222.

For spills of more than the amount of a thermometer, but less than or similar to two tablespoons, contact your local health department; or, if after hours, contact your local fire department without delay. When spills involve more than 2 tablespoons of mercury, it is **mandatory** to call the National Response Center at 800-424-8802 immediately, day or night.

OTHER CONTACT INFORMATION:

- N.C. Department of Environmental Quality – www.deq.nc.gov (search "mercury")
- Federal Environmental Protection Agency – www.epa.gov/hg
- Joseph Fitzpatrick, Environmental Specialist with the NCDE Assistance & Customer Service – 919-707-8121
- Iredell County Solid Waste - www.co.iredell.nc.us/350/Accepted-Recyclables