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Mercury-Containing Equipment Classified as Universal Waste

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is taking another major step to eliminate mercury in the environment by changing the waste management requirements for mercury-containing equipment. The new process encourages recovery and improved, safe management of mercury waste.

Action

EPA is adding mercury-containing equipment to the universal waste rule. The universal waste rule provides streamlined management requirements tailored to several different kinds of waste. The types of waste in the universal waste rule are frequently thrown in the trash by unregulated households and small businesses. Classifying an item as a universal waste provides flexibility for its proper management and can prevent the item from entering municipal trash. Instead, it can be readily collected and disposed of at a hazardous waste facility.

Handlers of this new category of universal waste must prevent mercury releases by using specific containers that will not release any mercury. Final disposal and recycling requirements remain the same as for other federally regulated hazardous waste.

Mercury-containing equipment includes devices, items, or articles that contain varying amounts of elemental mercury, including several types of instruments that are used throughout electric utilities and other industries, municipalities, and households. Some commonly recognized devices are thermostats, barometers, manometers, temperature and pressure gauges, and mercury switches, such as light switches in automobiles. Other items currently classified as universal waste are batteries, thermostats, pesticides, and lamps.

Impact

EPA estimates 1,877 generators handling approximately 550 tons of mercury-containing equipment will be affected by this rule. The Agency's analysis shows that adding used mercury-containing equipment to the universal waste program will improve implementation of, and compliance with, the federal hazardous waste program. The addition also will establish more facilities to consolidate mercury waste as well as reduce emissions from mercury.

For More Information

Please visit us on the Web at: <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/recycle/electron/crt.htm>.