

Household Thermostat Recycling

An Environmental Fact Sheet

- *Environmental issues*

Most thermostats are very long lasting, so they are rarely thrown out and make up a negligible portion of the trash going to our landfills. Thermostat disposal normally wouldn't be considered a significant environmental problem at all; however, **some types of thermostats have switches that contain mercury**. Mercury is a natural material with extremely useful properties, but if improperly managed it can pose serious health risks and can be a potent environmental contaminant.

A 1997 study in the Milwaukee metropolitan area examined uses of mercury and potential sources of mercury pollution. The study estimated that nearly half (47%) of the mercury in homes was in thermostats, and thermostat switches were the second biggest source of mercury in all solid waste (including industrial solid waste).

- *Recycling of mercury-containing thermostats*

When it's time to install a new thermostat in your home, find out if your old thermostat contains mercury. Mercury is found in tilt switches on most thermostats with manual (not electronic) controls. If the old thermostat does not contain mercury, you may throw it away with your regular trash. This is safe and legal, and there currently are no recycling options. **But if the old thermostat has a mercury tilt switch, please do not throw it away! Take advantage of one of the following special recycling options now available:**

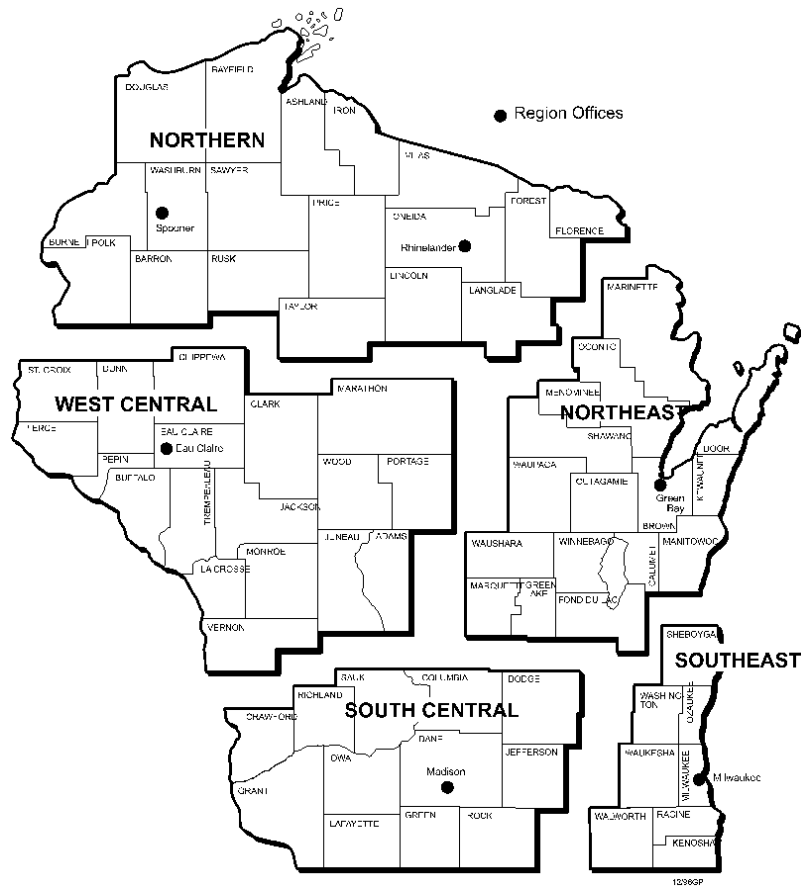
1. Reverse distribution (available through some contractors) -- In this program, participating suppliers and wholesalers in Wisconsin collect used mercury-switch thermostats from contractors and ship them to the Thermostat Recycling Corporation (TRC), who arranges to have the mercury recycled for other important uses. Many contractors, wholesalers, and suppliers in Wisconsin (and at least one electric utility) are using this reverse distribution system. **Ask contractors if they offer this service** and encourage them to work with wholesalers that participate in this program.
2. Drop-off recycling -- There may be opportunities in your area to drop off used mercury-switch thermostats for recycling. Many locations in Wisconsin have designated collection facilities for household hazardous waste or conduct annual or occasional "clean sweeps." Call your nearest DNR regional office (see map on next page) and ask a waste management specialist what options are available in your area.

- *For more information, contact your nearest DNR Regional Office...*

NORTHERN REGION
Department of Natural Resources
810 W. Maple Street
Spooner, WI 54801
(715) 635-2101

Waste Management Program
(715) 635-4065
(715) 635-4105 (fax)

Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 818
Rhinelander, WI 54501



(715) 365-8900

Waste Management Program
 (715) 365-8980
 (715) 365-8932 (fax)

NORTHEAST REGION
 Department of Natural Resources
 1125 N. Military Avenue
 P.O. Box 10448
 Green Bay, WI 54307
 (920) 492-5800

Waste Management Program
 (920) 492-5866
 (920) 492-5859 (fax)

WEST CENTRAL REGION
 Department of Natural Resources
 P.O. Box 4001
 Eau Claire, WI 54702-4001
 (715) 839-3700

Waste Management Program
 (715) 839-2788
 (715) 839-6076 (fax)

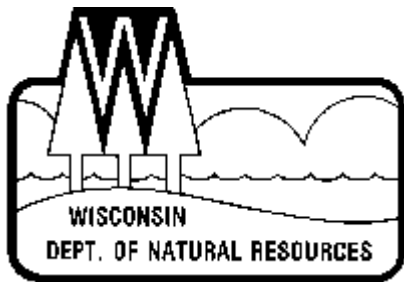
SOUTH CENTRAL REGION
 Department of Natural Resources
 3911 Fish Hatchery Road
 Fitchburg, WI 53711
 (608) 275-3266

Waste Management Program
 (608) 275-3289
 (608) 275-3338 (fax)

SOUTHEAST REGION
 Department of Natural Resources
 4041 N. Richards Drive
 P.O. Box 12436
 Milwaukee, WI 53212
 (414) 263-8500

Waste Management Program
 (414) 263-8678
 (414) 263-8716 (fax)

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