



# ASCIP *RISK ALERT!*

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**Date:** October 1, 1999

**Attention:** ASCIP Members

**Subject:** Science Equipment Containing Mercury

Recently, two ASCIP member Agencies reported that they had suffered Mercury spills as a result of breakage or upset of Mercury-filled science equipment. Elemental Mercury is a potentially dangerous substance that, if ingested or its vapors inhaled, may result in serious illness.

Equipment that may contain Mercury includes glass thermometers, Mercury column barometers, Mercury manometers, and similar types of breakable or spillable science and laboratory devices. Although some glass thermometers are manufactured with a clear plastic coating to reduce breakage, this feature is not foolproof. The recently released *California Science Safety Handbook for Public Schools* does not prohibit the use of devices which contain Mercury, however the *Handbook* does outline specific requirements for a Mercury spill kit and proper clean up of Mercury spills.

ASCIP has for some time recommended that wherever possible, Mercury-containing science and laboratory equipment be replaced with non-Mercury alternatives to avoid the potential danger to both staff and pupils and the expense of properly cleaning up a Mercury spill. Where no alternative equipment is available, extreme care should be taken to prevent equipment breakage or Mercury spills. Secondary containment for some larger equipment containing Mercury may be prudent to ensure that any spills or leaks are minimized.

ASCIP appreciates that school administrators and teachers attempt to make the science classroom conducive to the educational process. However, when potential risks outweigh the benefits of continuing certain experiments, or using equipment which could result in the costly release of a potentially harmful material, the decision to seek alternatives becomes imperative. **ASCIP members seeking assistance in reviewing science safety issues may contact ASCIP staff at any time to discuss specific issues of concern.**

*Reviewed July, 2006*