

# Why Connecticut Needs a Mercury Thermostat Take-Back Law

Product Stewardship is the act of minimizing health, safety, environmental and social impacts, and maximizing economic benefits of a product and its packaging throughout all lifecycle stages. The producer of the product has the greatest ability to minimize adverse impacts, but other stakeholders, such as suppliers, retailers, and consumers, also play a role. Stewardship can be either voluntary or required by law.

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## Preventing the release of mercury is a state priority

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin which can negatively impact both human health and the natural environment. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection has identified preventing mercury pollution as an environmental priority. A 2000 report by the department concluded that, *"For existing mercury-containing products and those products for which there is no feasible non-mercury alternative, collection programs need to be implemented to ensure that the mercury is recycled or safely disposed. Manufacturers need to help design and pay for the collection infrastructures appropriate to the products they produce."*<sup>1</sup>



Mercury can be released to the environment from the improper disposal of mercury-containing products. In New England, approximately 21% of anthropogenic mercury emissions are released from the disposal of mercury-containing products each year.<sup>2</sup> Based on California data developed for the thermostat industry, we estimate that more than 300 pounds of mercury is likely entering the waste stream each year in Connecticut from the disposal of old mercury-containing thermostats.<sup>3</sup>

## Collecting thermostats is an easy, cost-effective way to reduce mercury pollution

The mercury in these thermostats can be properly managed if professional contractors (who replace approximately 75% of all old thermostats), retailers, wholesalers, and manufacturers work together to collect mercury-containing thermostats as is being done in other states.

## Voluntary programs have failed to show results

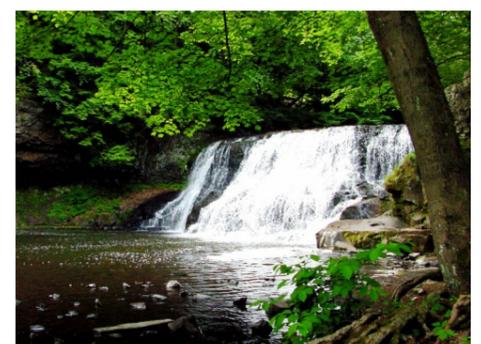
The industry has had plenty of time to demonstrate that the voluntary program they have put in place can stem this preventable source of mercury pollution, and Connecticut needs a better program to collect the approximately 38,300 thermostats that come out of service each year.<sup>4</sup> While the companies that manufactured mercury-containing thermostats have established a voluntary take-back program through the Thermostat Recycling Corporation (TRC) the voluntary program operating in Connecticut is unfortunately not working. As of the most recent publicly reported data from the TRC, in 2008 they collected just 1,838 mercury thermostats in Connecticut, or 5.2 thermostats per 10,000 residents. On the other hand, TRC collected more than 8 times that amount in Maine, or more than 40 thermostats per 10,000 residents that same year, under a 2006 law that requires a \$5 payment per thermostat to contractors as an incentive.<sup>5</sup>

## Connecticut Needs an Effective Collection Program

We know from experience with other states what it takes to create a successful collection program:

1. Conveniently located collection points across the state.
2. Active and sustained education and outreach campaigns.
3. Transparent reporting of program results.
4. Enforcement mechanisms.
5. Meaningful collection goals.
6. Financial incentive to encourage the return of old mercury thermostats for recycling.

States that have included these simple provisions have seen dramatic increases in collection; however, those that have implemented weak laws have seen the status quo continue nearly uninterrupted.



## Citations

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3. Skumatz, Ph.D., Lisa A. *Mercury-Containing Thermostats: Estimating Inventory and Flow from Existing Residential & Commercial Buildings A Study to Meet Requirements for State of California Thermostat Recycling Legislation*. Rep. Skumatz Economic Research Associates, Inc. (SERA), 28 Dec. 2009. Web. <[http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/upload/TRCThermostat-Report-12\\_09.pdf](http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/upload/TRCThermostat-Report-12_09.pdf)>.
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5. Thermostat Recycling Corporation. *Thermostat Recycling Corporation 2008 Annual Report*. Rep. 2009. Print.