MERCURY IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Mercury (Hg) pollution is a worldwide problem with far reaching effects. Although mercury is a naturally occurring substance, it can cause serious health and ecological problems when released into the environment at high levels through human activities.

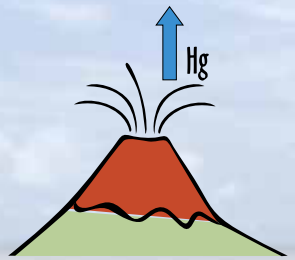
Sources

Human Activities

Released from the burning of coal, oil, or natural gas, and the incineration of mercury-containing garbage.

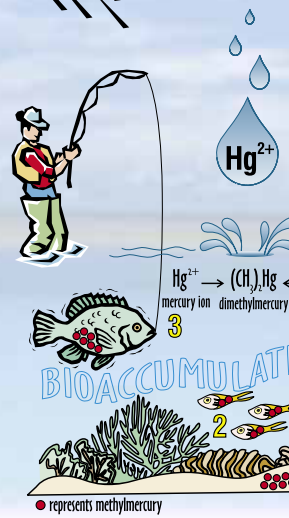
Natural Processes

Released from oceans, volcanic eruptions, soil decomposition or erosion.



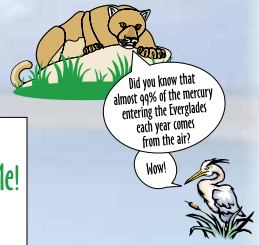
Atmosphere

Once in the air, mercury can fall to the ground with rain and snow causing contamination of soils or water bodies.



MERCURY RISING

Mercury levels rise in each predator. This process, called *bioaccumulation*, can result in a level of mercury in the topmost predator up to 10,000,000 times greater than the original amount in surrounding waters!



Solutions to Mercury Pollution

Scientists are working to:

✓ Identify sources of mercury ✓ Monitor mercury levels

What can you do?

Practice proper disposal of mercury-containing products like:

✓ fluorescent lights ✓ thermostats ✓ thermometers

Human Concerns:

Mercury can cause many different health problems in people. Young and unborn children are most at risk.

Exposure can result in long term damage to the:

- central nervous system
- kidneys
- liver

One, Two, Three . . . This is How Mercury Can Get Inside of Me!

1. In water, it is taken up by tiny animals and plants known as plankton.
2. Minnows and juvenile fish eat the plankton.
3. Large fish eat the smaller fish, accumulating methylmercury in their bodies. Humans catch and eat these fish resulting in the buildup of methylmercury in their body tissues.

BROWARD COUNTY FLORIDA
Broward County Board of County Commissioners
AIR QUALITY PROGRAM
www.broward.org/air
954-519-1220