

Mercury

The Environmental Protection Agency and the National Center for Atmospheric Research estimates 5,000 to 5,500 tons of mercury are currently in the atmosphere worldwide. About half of that comes from human activities and half comes from natural sources like the ocean, volcanoes and soil erosion.

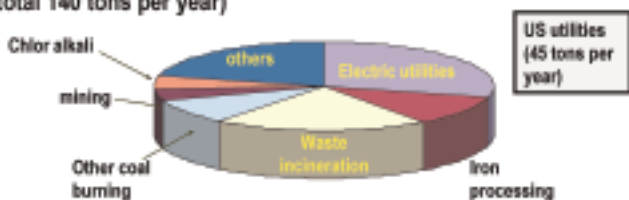
Worldwide Mercury Emissions



Of the human-caused mercury releases, emissions are either oxidized (water soluble) or elemental. These are largely from industrial sources, including the burning of municipal and medical waste, fossil fuel combustion, pulp and paper milling, cement production, manufacturing of pesticides and chlorine-based industrial products, mining and water treatment facilities.

US Manmade Mercury Emissions

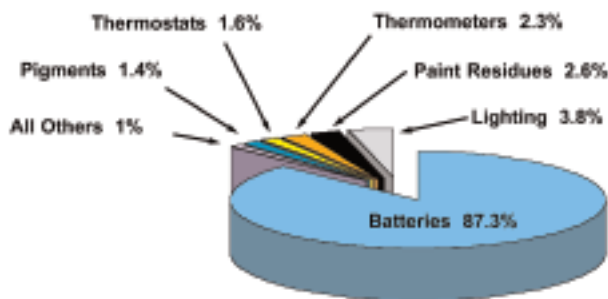
(total 140 tons per year)



It is important though to keep in mind that mercury emissions from power plants represent only about 1% of the total global, airborne emissions (that's one-third of man-made emissions in the U.S.) If a pipe, one foot in diameter, stretching the 238,000 miles from Earth to the moon, were filled with coal-fired power plant emissions, and the mercury all magically brought to one end, it would only take up the first 18 inches of the pipe.

Mercury travels thousands of miles and remains airborne for as long as one year before it falls to the Earth's surface. According to research by the Brookhaven National Laboratory, only 4% to 7% of mercury release is deposited in the same location. Current research shows that about 30% of the mercury deposited in the U.S. originates in other countries.

Sources of Mercury in Common Household Waste



Once mercury enters water bodies, it can be converted to methylmercury and enter the aquatic food chain, where it bioaccumulates in fish tissue. Most human intake of mercury comes from eating certain types of fish or seafood containing "methylmercury."