



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY NEWS RELEASE

Department of Toxic Substances Control

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Fresno VA Hospital to receive HELP award for mercury reduction

The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) will present the VA Central California Hospital in Fresno with the Mercury (Hg) Elimination Leadership Program (HELP) Award on Tuesday, Dec. 6, at 11 a.m. The hospital earned this recognition for successfully completing the Mercury (Hg) Elimination Leadership Program, initiated by DTSC two years ago to reduce mercury from California medical facilities.

"We are pleased with the accomplishments of the VA Hospital in Fresno and the other hospitals throughout California that voluntarily eliminated mercury from their facilities. Cooperative efforts such as this go a long way toward reaching the goals of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's environmental action plan to reduce toxic waste in the state," said Leonard Robinson, Acting Director for the California Department of Toxic Substances Control.

Mercury is a reproductive toxin and a potent neurotoxin. When hospitals throw away mercury-containing devices such as fever thermometers, blood pressure cuffs, and other products, mercury can reenter the environment through gases released by landfills and by leaching into the groundwater. Many publicly owned treatment works are now requiring hospitals to meet strict wastewater treatment discharge limits for mercury. When mercury-containing waste is incinerated, the mercury is vaporized into the air. According to the U.S. EPA, medical waste incinerators are the fourth largest source of mercury going into the environment. Mercury fever thermometers alone contribute about 17 tons of mercury to solid waste landfills annually.

It is estimated that the VA Central California Hospital removed 22,500 grams (50 lbs.) of mercury. This is the second Veterans Hospital to receive the HELP Award. A total of 64 hospitals in California have earned the honor. Virtual elimination of mercury by these hospitals means they completed all of the following:

- Inventoried all mercury devices and sources.
- Replaced, at a minimum, 75 percent of the blood pressure cuffs, clinical mercury-containing devices, laboratory chemicals containing mercury, and the mercury laboratory thermometers inventoried. They also prepared a plan for total elimination of the remaining devices.
- Replaced patient mercury thermometers with non-mercury containing devices.
- Developed and implemented a fluorescent tube recycling program.
- Developed and implemented a mercury and alkaline battery collection program.
- Prepared and put into practice an Environmental Preferable Purchasing (EPP) statement that bans the purchase of mercury containing items without prior approval.

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On behalf of Acting Director Leonard Robinson, Astrid Brown, Compliance Chief at the DTSC Clovis Regional Office, will present the Medical Center Director, Al Perry, with the HELP Award certificate and banner at a ceremony at the VA Hospital in Fresno. Special recognition will be given to Tom Jeys, Environmental Management Program Manager, and Roger Scott, Safety Specialist, for their work in accomplishing this mission, which was wholly supported by the Veterans Affairs Environmental Programs Services in Washington, D.C.

To learn more about the Mercury (Hg) Elimination Leadership Program, visit <http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/Mercury/HELP/index.html>.

- What:** VA Central California Hospital in Fresno to receive the HELP Award from California Department of Toxic Substances Control.
- When:** Tuesday, Dec. 6 at 11 a.m.
- Where:** 2615 E. Clinton Ave. in Fresno
- Contact:** Carol Singleton, Public Information Officer for the Dept. of Toxic Substances Control

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The Department of Toxic Substances Control's mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the environment and ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality by regulating hazardous waste, conducting and overseeing cleanups, and developing and promoting pollution prevention.