



# CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY NEWS RELEASE

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## Department of Toxic Substances Control

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### St. Joseph Health System Receives Award for Mercury Reduction Efforts

CYPRESS, Calif. –The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) presented St. Joseph Health System with the Mercury (Hg) Elimination Leadership Program (HELP) Award on Jan. 5, 2006.

Nine hospitals in the St. Joseph Health System earned this important recognition for successfully reducing or eliminating the use of mercury by replacing mercury thermometers, lab products, blood pressure cuffs, and other clinical devices containing mercury.

The HELP program was initiated by DTSC two years ago to reduce mercury from California medical facilities.

“We are pleased with the accomplishments of St. Joseph Health System hospitals throughout California that voluntarily eliminated mercury from their facilities,” said Leonard Robinson, Acting Director for the DTSC. “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.”

St. Joseph Health System hospitals have eliminated 402 pounds of mercury; that was more than 98 percent of the mercury that was being used.

“The mission of St. Joseph Health System calls us to improve the health and quality of life of the people in the communities we serve,” said Sr. Diane Hejna, Director of Ecology Programs. “Clearly, our efforts to eliminate mercury from our hospitals is a demonstration of that mission and of our values of dignity, service, excellence and justice.”

Under the HELP program, hospitals achieve virtual elimination after they have:

- Inventoried all mercury devices and sources
- Replaced 75 percent of the blood pressure cuffs, clinical mercury-containing devices, laboratory chemicals containing mercury, and the mercury laboratory thermometers inventoried
- 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 statement that bans the purchase of mercury-containing items without prior approval

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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.

SJHS hospitals in California were honored with the HELP award. These include:

- Mission Hospital (Mission Viejo)
- Petaluma Valley Hospital (Petaluma)
- Queen of the Valley Hospital (Napa)
- Redwood Memorial Hospital (Fortuna)
- Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital (Santa Rosa)
- St. Joseph Hospital (Eureka)
- St. Joseph Hospital (Orange)
- St. Jude Medical Center (Fullerton)
- St. Mary Medical Center (Apple Valley)

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

### **About St. Joseph Health System**

St. Joseph Health System (SJHS) is an integrated healthcare delivery organization that exists to extend the Catholic healthcare ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange. SJHS provides a broad range of medical services within three geographic regions -- Northern California, Southern California and West Texas/Eastern New Mexico. With revenues of \$3.2 billion, the system family includes 14 hospitals and three home health agencies, as well as hospice care, outpatient services, skilled nursing facilities and physician organizations. SJHS is enriched by the services of nearly 18,000 employees and more than 1,500 affiliated physicians. In 2005, SJHS provided more than \$384 million in community benefit and care for the poor services. For more information, log on to [www.stjhs.org](http://www.stjhs.org)

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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.***