

Medical Devices

Mercury in Medical Devices

a) Mercury free medical devices for public use

On the 1 August 2005, an ordinance for the reduction of risks while handling particularly dangerous materials, preparations and articles (Chemikalien-Risikoreduktions-Verordnung, ChemRRV, SR 814.81) entered into force in Switzerland. Therein is also determined that as of 30 June 2006, no more instruments or devices containing mercury may be distributed to the public.

In respect to medical devices, this restriction applies especially to mercury containing fever thermometers and blood pressure devices that are fitted with a mercury manometer (mercury sphygmomanometers).

Instruments and apparatuses that contain elementary mercury pose a health risk if through damage or breakage the mercury is released. To reduce this risk, it is recommended that household thermometers and mercury sphygmomanometers be replaced with non-mercury containing devices. Under no circumstances should the old instruments and apparatuses be disposed of in household refuse. These instruments are deemed to be hazardous waste and are usually returned to the point where the replacement product is purchased.

b) Thermometers and blood pressure monitors for professional use in public health facilities and practices

This distribution prohibition also applies to fever thermometers containing mercury that are intended for professional use. However, it is assumed that to a large extent in public health facilities mercury-free thermometers are already procured and used.

This distribution prohibition does not apply to blood pressure monitors. Due to their high reliability, mercury sphygmomanometers are suitable for use as reference devices or for calibration purposes. However, in the view of the risks in handling mercury, it is recommended to procure and use mercury-free devices for routine measurements.

Further information on the chemical risk reduction ordinance can be obtained from the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN / BAFU).

- E-Mail: urs.vonarx@bafu.admin.ch
- Internet: www.bafu.admin.ch > chemicals > implementation > mercury