

Date: Thu, 03 Dec 1998 13:44:18 -0600

**Title: Ames Yellow Alert: Mercury Release**

**Lessons Learned Statement-** Hazardous material, such as mercury, can be encountered in unexpected ways. If you have to handle equipment, be aware that not all systems are sealed, and handling the equipment may release these hazardous materials.

**Events:** An employee was assisting with the disassembly of a system no longer in use. The system was complicated, and digital photos were shared with a past employee off-site, to determine how to disassemble and dispose of components. The past employee told the employee during a phone conversation that an item in one of the photos contained mercury, and needed to be disposed. The employee, recognizing the device from the digital photo, picked it up and transported it to the ESH&A offices in TASF. While en route, the employee carried the device sideways, which allowed the mercury to drip from the device onto the floor. A hallway area outside the original lab, the stairs leading to the next floor up, a portion of the higher floor, the entryway to the outside, and the sidewalk immediately outside the building were involved by the time the mistake was discovered.

Another employee, observing the cleanup effort, realized that two similar devices were present in his own work area. Concerned that the same incident could be repeated, he also transported the two devices to an ESH&A area to have them disposed.

**Immediate Corrective Actions-** The first device was bagged and stored in a plastic container. The areas affected by the spill were isolated by barricade ribbon, and the floors were HEPA vacuumed to pick up the mercury droplets from all affected floors. Clean up took approximately two hours, and involved the efforts of five people. The two other devices were transported intact, and were stored for disposal.

**Recommendations:** At no time are waste products to be transported to ESH&A areas. A call to ESH&A at 4-2153 will initiate a stop by the Chem Waste staff to pick up the materials at your door. The staff doing the pick-up make trips around the Lab twice a week, and will bring the supplies and equipment necessary to transport the material safely.

If you have any questions or comments, please call Jim Withers at 294-4743.