



Environmental Stewardship Awards

Bowling Green State University's Elemental Mercury Collection and Reclamation Program

In 2008, Bowling Green State University received a Governor's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Environmental Stewardship. The award recognizes Ohio companies and organizations committed to environmental compliance and reducing pollution.

Bowling Green State University's (BGSU) Elemental Mercury Collection and Reclamation Program¹ collected uncontaminated elemental mercury contained in a variety of devices. Since 1998, the program collected more than 19,500 pounds of mercury throughout Ohio and other states.

The program implemented many measures to improve efficiencies in collecting and processing mercury and mercury-containing devices. The program's activities saved the university money and benefitted facilities that needed to remove mercury. Providing a safe way to manage mercury also helped reduce the adverse health and environmental impacts associated with mercury releases to the environment.

The Mercury Collection Program

BGSU's program included collecting and recycling elemental mercury from devices such as thermometers, manometers, barometers, thermostats and switches. The program also collected containers of bulk elemental mercury. The program was available at no-cost to individuals, academic institutions, small businesses, industries, medical and dental facilities, governmental agencies, spill response companies, and other entities.

Since the program started, over 19,500 pounds of mercury were collected from sources throughout Ohio and several other states. Using BGSU's approach as a model, other Ohio counties established cooperative mercury collection programs. BGSU also assisted Ohio EPA's Office of Compliance Assistance and Pollution Prevention in helping medical care facilities establish mercury reduction programs.

BGSU's Elemental Mercury Collection and Reclamation Program was recognized for:

- Removing more than 19,500 pounds of mercury from a variety of sources throughout Ohio as well as from locations in other States since 1998, eliminating the potential for exposure hazards associated with mercury; and
- Implementing many measures that have resulted in more efficient and cost-effective processing of mercury and the mercury-containing items.

¹ Bowling Green State University's Elemental Mercury Collection and Reclamation Program was discontinued in December 2010.

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During 2001, in conjunction with area health departments, BGSU sponsored thermometer exchange projects in four northeast Ohio counties. In 2002, BGSU, through grant funding from Ohio EPA, conducted thermometer exchange projects in 22 southeastern Ohio counties. Working with 29 county and city health departments within the region, the partnership programs were able to remove almost 8,300 mercury-containing thermometers from the area.

After the collection program began, an educational video was made to help people understand the hazards of elemental mercury releases. The video has been distributed to numerous entities throughout the United States and was also sent to a university in Brazil. References to BGSU's program are also provided in a video developed and distributed by Ohio EPA and the Ohio Mercury Reduction Group entitled: *The Magic Metal: Mercury and Its Hidden Dangers*.

Many formal presentations by BGSU and other partners of the mercury collection program were provided at various conferences throughout the United States.

Success and Innovation

The primary measurement of program's success was the amount of mercury removed during the program's existence. During its initial year in 1998, the program collected 190 pounds of mercury. The program grew, collecting 3,834 pounds during 2004 to 3,145 pounds in 2007. The program's growth exceeded expectations for the amounts of mercury collected.

A key factor in the success of BGSU's program was the collaborative partnerships between the university, Ohio EPA, consultants, transportation and recycling services, county Emergency Management Agencies and health departments. There was also a continuous evaluation of how to make the program more effective and efficient.

BGSU's Elemental Mercury Collection program was innovative in several ways, with a high level of commitment from individuals, organizations, and agencies, all focused on a common goal of mercury reduction. Through the leadership of BGSU, the program achieved recognition at state and national levels, and still serves today as a model for other mercury collection programs across the country.

For more information

For more information about the BGSU program, contact Ohio EPA's Office of Compliance Assistance and Pollution Prevention (OCAPP) at (800) 329-7518. More information about Ohio EPA's environmental stewardship award program is available through OCAPP's website at www.epa.ohio.gov/ocapp/ohioe3.aspx.