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Thermostat mercury continues to plague US waters

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A new study estimates that only eight per cent of mercury thermostats that came out of service in the past decade were recycled.

The April 2013 study by the Multi-State Mercury Products Campaign (MMPC) and the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) is called Turning up the Heat II. It suggests that more than 50 tonnes of mercury have been trashed, damaging the environment and exposing people to the neurotoxin through fish consumption.

"For decades, companies like Honeywell, White-Rodgers and General Electric profited from the sale of mercury thermostats but now are shirking their responsibilities when it comes to preventing pollution," said Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project, in a statement to media. "In state after state, manufacturers have pushed for collection programs that don't work. It's time to disregard their misinformation and do what's right to protect public health."

Mercury-filled thermostats are a significant source of preventable mercury pollution, the study says. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has estimated that two to three million thermostats come out of service each year in the U.S., amounting to seven to 10 tonnes of mercury annually. Each thermostat contains an average of four grams of mercury.

In 2010, MMPC released the first edition of Turning up the Heat, which evaluated 2008 collection data and found dismal collection rates. Turning Up the Heat II shows that little improvement has been made in the three years since, resulting in tonnes of mercury pollution in the nation's water bodies.

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