



For release: July 1, 2010

Contacts:

Sheila Dormody, Clean Water Action, Rhode Island, (401) 331-6972, sdormody@cleanwater.org
Elizabeth Stone, RI Dept. of Environmental Management, (401) 222-4700 x2422 elizabeth.stone@dem.ri.gov
Scott Cassel, Product Stewardship Institute Inc., (617) 236-4822, scott@productstewardship.us

Rhode Island Bill to Tighten Control of Mercury Pollution from Thermostats
New law requires safe management of mercury thermostats found in homes/businesses across state

Providence, RI. The Rhode Island General Assembly, with support from thermostat manufacturers, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, and Clean Water Action passed the Mercury Thermostat Pollution Prevention Act both in the Senate (S2353A) and the House (H7199A). The bills, which were sponsored by Senator Dominick J. Ruggerio and Representative Jan P. Malik, were endorsed by the General Assembly on the last days of the legislative session and became law on June 25th. The new law requires thermostat manufacturers to manage the collection and recycling of old mercury-containing thermostats.

The Rhode Island thermostat recycling law is supported by Honeywell, the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the Rhode Island Department of Health, Clean Water Action, and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island. The original bill was based on a model developed by the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) with input from thermostat manufacturers, heating and cooling contractors and wholesalers, retailers, environmental groups, and government officials. The Rhode Island Senate Policy Office developed the compromise version of the bill which earned the support of manufacturers and passed in its second year before the General Assembly. Rhode Island is the ninth state to pass legislation based on the PSI model.

The Mercury Reduction and Education Act has made it illegal to sell mercury thermostats in Rhode Island since 2006. However, hundreds of thousands of mercury thermostats are still in use in Rhode Island homes and businesses, and the new legislation requires thermostat manufacturers to provide a comprehensive system to safely manage them. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, mercury exposure poses the greatest health risks to pregnant women and children and can lead to memory loss, complications related to attention and language, inhibited motor and coordination skills, and many other areas of neurological development.

“By passing this law, the General Assembly has taken a critical step to prevent mercury pollution from thermostats and to protect the health and development of our children,” said Sheila Dormody, Rhode Island Director of Clean Water Action. “This law will prevent significant public health and environmental risks by providing a management system to help stop hundreds of pounds of mercury from being released to Rhode Island’s air, soil and water.”

“We look forward to working with thermostat manufacturers, heating and cooling contractors and wholesalers, and other stakeholders to make this program convenient and successful in Rhode Island,” said Terry Gray, Assistant Director for Air, Waste and Compliance, RI DEM. “With the adoption of this new law, Rhode Island extends its commitment to the core principles of extended producer responsibility and deepens its efforts to control the impacts of mercury in the environment.”

“This is Rhode Island’s third law that holds manufacturers accountable for reducing the environmental impacts of their products,” said Scott Cassel, Executive Director of the Product Stewardship Institute. “Product stewardship laws like these are sweeping the country, and Rhode Island has become a national leader.”

The first action required will come as soon as November 2010 when manufacturers must submit an implementation plan to DEM.

For more information on mercury reduction efforts in Rhode Island, go to DEM's website at: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/topics/mercury.htm>

For more information on Clean Water Action, visit the following website at: <http://www.cleanwateraction.org/ri>.

For more information about the national Mercury Product Stewardship Initiative, go to PSI's website at: <http://www.productstewardship.us/Thermostats>.

For information on the health effects of mercury, see: <http://www.epa.gov/mercury/effects.htm>.

For the media release from the Rhode Island General Assembly (which includes links to the text of the law), see: <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/News/pr1.asp?prid=6616>.

###