



**News**

**Activists Urge Tougher Mercury Law**

By Maureen Turner

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Last month, the Massachusetts Senate passed a bill addressing the recycling of old thermostats that contain mercury. Environmental groups say the bill doesn't go far enough and are urging legislators instead to adopt a model that they say has worked well in neighboring states. The bill, which passed in the Senate on March 28, mandates that contractors recycle mercury-containing thermostats they remove in their work and that thermostat wholesalers provide collection sites for them. It would replace an existing voluntary recycling program sponsored by thermostat manufacturers. While a number of states, including Massachusetts, have banned the sale of thermostats that contain mercury, concerns remain about the safe disposal of older thermostats that remain in many homes and businesses. Mercury, a neurotoxin that can cause developmental damage, may enter water sources, contaminating fish and poisoning people who eat them.

A 2010 report by Clean Water Action found that Massachusetts' voluntary recycling program was only capturing 4.3 old thermostats per 10,000 residents, compared to the 22 per 10,000 collected in neighboring Vermont, and the nation-leading 42.2 collected in Maine. CWA is among the groups now calling on Massachusetts legislators to consider a collection program similar to those states'. They point to a new report released by CWA, the Multi-state Mercury Products Campaign and the Product Stewardship Institute that finds that even mandatory recycling programs, like the one being considered in Massachusetts, do not yield much better recycling rates than those in states with no such laws. Such programs carry no guarantee that contractors will recycle the thermostats they remove, Elizabeth Saunders, director of CWA Massachusetts, told the *Advocate*.

The most effective programs, Saunders said, offer incentives for recycling; in Maine and Vermont, for instance, manufacturers must pay \$5 to contractors and homeowners for each mercury thermostat they return. CWA supports a bill that would offer a \$5-per-thermostat bounty. Its co-sponsors include state reps. Denise Andrews (D-Orange), Peter Kocot (D-Northampton), Stephen Kulik (D-Worthington), John Scibak (D-South Hadley) and Ellen Story (D-Amherst). The environmental groups support a similar bill, filed by Story, that addresses the recycling of light bulbs containing mercury.

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