

An action level is an indoor air concentration of mercury vapor that should prompt public health and environmental officials to consider implementing response actions. The various suggested action levels provided in this document are intended as recommendations, not as regulatory values or cleanup values, although some may correspond to present or future values adopted by regulatory authorities. These action levels are provided primarily to prevent adverse health effects by identifying environmental concentration associated with any level of toxicity.

Studies indicate that 1,000 ng/m³ (1 ug/m³) is considered a level acceptable for occupancy of any structure after a spill (also called the residential occupancy level.) The level 10,000 ng/m³ (10 ug/m³) is considered a level where residents should isolate from the exposure.

According to the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR), the primary route of entry for metallic mercury is by inhalation; ingestion and skin absorption of this form of mercury is usually not biologically significant. Sensitive populations to mercury exposure are those with developing central nervous systems, including young children and the fetuses of women who are pregnant. Other individuals of potential concern are those with pre-existing kidney conditions, usually at exposures to much higher concentrations than the first group. The specific exposure of these groups in any given situation should be considered when assessing the need for any given response action.