



# Right to Know Hazardous Substance Fact Sheet

Common Name: **MERCURIC OXIDE**

Synonyms: Yellow Oxide of Mercury; Mercury Monoxide

Chemical Name: Mercuric Oxide

Date: April 2008

Revision: January 2017

CAS Number: 21908-53-2

RTK Substance Number: 2537

DOT Number: UN 1641

## Description and Use

**Mercuric Oxide** is a yellow to orange-yellow, odorless, crystalline powder. It is used in alkaline batteries and pigments, as a seed protectant, and as a preservative in cosmetics.

## Reasons for Citation

- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** is on the Right to Know Hazardous Substance List because it is cited by OSHA, ACGIH, DOT, NIOSH, DEP, IARC, and EPA.
- ▶ This chemical is on the Special Health Hazard Substance List.

[SEE GLOSSARY ON PAGE 5.](#)

## FIRST AID

### Eye Contact

- ▶ Immediately flush with large amounts of cool water for at least 15 minutes, lifting upper and lower lids. Remove contact lenses, if worn, while flushing. Seek medical attention immediately.

### Skin Contact

- ▶ Quickly remove contaminated clothing. Immediately wash contaminated skin with large amounts of soap and water. Seek medical attention immediately.

### Inhalation

- ▶ Remove the person from exposure.
- ▶ Begin rescue breathing (using universal precautions) if breathing has stopped and CPR if heart action has stopped.
- ▶ Transfer promptly to a medical facility.

## EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222

CHEMTREC: 1-800-424-9300

NJDEP Hotline: 1-877-927-6337

National Response Center: 1-800-424-8802

## EMERGENCY RESPONDERS >>>> SEE BACK PAGE

### Hazard Summary

Hazard Rating	NJDHSS	NFPA
<b>HEALTH</b>	3	-
<b>FLAMMABILITY</b>	0	-
<b>REACTIVITY</b>	0	-
TERATOGEN POISONOUS GASES ARE PRODUCED IN FIRE DOES NOT BURN		

*Hazard Rating Key: 0=minimal; 1=slight; 2=moderate; 3=serious; 4=severe*

- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** can affect you when inhaled and by passing through the skin.
- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** should be handled as a TERATOGEN-- WITH EXTREME CAUTION.
- ▶ Contact can irritate and burn the skin and eyes with possible eye damage.
- ▶ Inhaling **Mercuric Oxide** can irritate the nose, throat and lungs.
- ▶ Exposure can cause metallic taste in the mouth, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain.
- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** may cause a skin allergy and make the skin turn gray.
- ▶ Repeated exposure can cause *Mercury* poisoning with tremors, personality changes, trouble remembering and concentrating, and gum problems.
- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** may damage the kidneys.

## Workplace Exposure Limits

The following exposure limits are for *inorganic Mercury compounds* (measured as *Mercury*):

OSHA: The legal airborne permissible exposure limit (PEL) is **0.1 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** averaged over an 8-hour workshift.

NIOSH: The recommended airborne exposure limit (REL) is **0.05 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** (as *Mercury vapor*) averaged over a 10-hour workshift and **0.1 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** (as other *Mercury compounds*), not to be exceeded during any 15-minute work period.

ACGIH: The threshold limit value (TLV) is **0.025 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** averaged over an 8-hour workshift.

- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** may be a teratogen in humans. All contact with this chemical should be reduced to the lowest possible level.

**(Workplace Exposure Limits Continued)**

- ▶ The above exposure limits are for air levels only. When skin contact also occurs, you may be overexposed, even though air levels are less than the limits listed above.

**Determining Your Exposure**

- ▶ Read the product manufacturer's Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) and the label to determine product ingredients and important safety and health information about the product mixture.
- ▶ For each individual hazardous ingredient, read the New Jersey Department of Health Hazardous Substance Fact Sheet, available on the RTK Program website (<http://nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/right-to-know/>) or in your facility's RTK Central File or Hazard Communication Standard file.
- ▶ You have a right to this information under the New Jersey Worker and Community Right to Know Act, the Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health (PEOSH) Act if you are a public worker in New Jersey, and under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) if you are a private worker.
- ▶ The New Jersey Right to Know Act and the PEOSH Hazard Communication Standard (N.J.A.C. 12:100-7) requires most employers to label chemicals in the workplace and requires public employers to provide their employees with information concerning chemical hazards and controls. The federal OSHA Hazard Communication Standard (29 CFR 1910.1200) requires private employers to provide similar information and training to their employees.

This Fact Sheet is a summary of available information regarding the health hazards that may result from exposure. Duration of exposure, concentration of the substance and other factors will affect your susceptibility to any of the potential effects described below.

**Health Hazard Information****Acute Health Effects**

The following acute (short-term) health effects may occur immediately or shortly after exposure to **Mercuric Oxide**:

- ▶ Contact can irritate and burn the skin and eyes with possible eye damage.
- ▶ Inhaling **Mercuric Oxide** can irritate the nose, throat and lungs causing coughing, wheezing and/or shortness of breath.
- ▶ Exposure can cause metallic taste in the mouth, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain.

**Chronic Health Effects**

The following chronic (long-term) health effects can occur at some time after exposure to **Mercuric Oxide** and can last for months or years:

**Cancer Hazard**

- ▶ While **Mercuric Oxide** has been tested, it is not classifiable as to its potential to cause cancer.

**Reproductive Hazard**

- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** may be a TERATOGEN in humans since it is a teratogen in animals.
- ▶ There is limited evidence that **Mercuric Oxide** may affect male fertility.

**Other Effects**

- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** may cause a skin allergy. If allergy develops, very low future exposure can cause itching and a skin rash.
- ▶ Repeated contact can cause the skin to turn gray, brown staining in the eyes, and may affect peripheral vision (ability to see to the sides).
- ▶ Repeated exposure or a very high single exposure can cause *Mercury poisoning*. Symptoms include tremors (shaking), trouble remembering and concentrating, gum problems, increased salivation, loss of appetite and weight, and changes in mood and personality. These can be severe and cause hallucinating and psychosis.
- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** may damage the kidneys.

**Medical****Medical Testing**

For frequent or potentially high exposure (half the TLV or greater), the following are recommended before beginning work and at regular times after that:

- ▶ Exam of the nervous system (including handwriting test to detect early hand tremor)
- ▶ Urine *Mercury* level (usually less than **0.02 mg/liter**)
- ▶ Kidney function tests

If symptoms develop or overexposure is suspected, the following are recommended:

- ▶ Lung function tests
- ▶ Exam of the eyes and vision
- ▶ Evaluation by a qualified allergist can help diagnose skin allergy.

Any evaluation should include a careful history of past and present symptoms with an exam. Medical tests that look for damage already done are not a substitute for controlling exposure.

Request copies of your medical testing. You have a legal right to this information under the OSHA Access to Employee Exposure and Medical Records Standard (29 CFR 1910.1020).

**Mixed Exposures**

- ▶ Creams to whiten or bleach skin may contain *Mercury*. If you use them, you may be at increased risk of *Mercury* poisoning. A high fish diet, especially of marine predatory fish (fish-eating fish), also may increase your blood *Mercury* levels.

## Workplace Controls and Practices

Very toxic chemicals, or those that are reproductive hazards or sensitizers, require expert advice on control measures if a less toxic chemical cannot be substituted. Control measures include: (1) enclosing chemical processes for severely irritating and corrosive chemicals, (2) using local exhaust ventilation for chemicals that may be harmful with a single exposure, and (3) using general ventilation to control exposures to skin and eye irritants. For further information on workplace controls, consult the NIOSH document on Control Banding at [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ctrlbanding/](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ctrlbanding/).

The following work practices are also recommended:

- ▶ Label process containers.
- ▶ Provide employees with hazard information and training.
- ▶ Monitor airborne chemical concentrations.
- ▶ Use engineering controls if concentrations exceed recommended exposure levels.
- ▶ Provide eye wash fountains and emergency showers.
- ▶ Wash or shower if skin comes in contact with a hazardous material.
- ▶ Always wash at the end of the workshift.
- ▶ Change into clean clothing if clothing becomes contaminated.
- ▶ Do not take contaminated clothing home.
- ▶ Get special training to wash contaminated clothing.
- ▶ Do not eat, smoke, or drink in areas where chemicals are being handled, processed or stored.
- ▶ Wash hands carefully before eating, smoking, drinking, applying cosmetics or using the toilet.

In addition, the following may be useful or required:

- ▶ For clean-up, use a specialized charcoal-filtered vacuum to avoid generating *Mercury vapor*. Do not disturb spilled material.

## Personal Protective Equipment

The OSHA Personal Protective Equipment Standard (29 CFR 1910.132) requires employers to determine the appropriate personal protective equipment for each hazard and to train employees on how and when to use protective equipment.

The following recommendations are only guidelines and may not apply to every situation.

### Gloves and Clothing

- ▶ Avoid skin contact with **Mercuric Oxide**. Wear personal protective equipment made from material which can not be permeated or degraded by this substance. Safety equipment suppliers and manufacturers can provide recommendations on the most protective glove and clothing material for your operation.
- ▶ Safety equipment manufacturers recommend Silver Shield®/4H® for gloves and DuPont Tychem® Polycoat, QC, CPF 1, SL and CPF 2; Kappler® Zytron® 300; and Saint-Gobain OneSUIT® TEC, or the equivalent, as protective materials for clothing.
- ▶ All protective clothing (suits, gloves, footwear, headgear) should be clean, available each day, and put on before work.

### Eye Protection

- ▶ Wear eye protection with side shields or goggles.
- ▶ Wear a face shield along with goggles when working with corrosive, highly irritating or toxic substances.

### Respiratory Protection

**Improper use of respirators is dangerous.** Respirators should only be used if the employer has implemented a written program that takes into account workplace conditions, requirements for worker training, respirator fit testing, and medical exams, as described in the OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard (29 CFR 1910.134).

- ▶ For field applications check with your supervisor and your safety equipment supplier regarding the appropriate respiratory equipment.
- ▶ Where the potential exists for exposure to *Mercury vapor* over **0.05 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** as an 8-hour average airborne exposure, but less than **0.5 mg/m<sup>3</sup>**, use a NIOSH approved half-mask respirator with cartridges specific for *Mercury vapor*. These cartridges have end of service life indicators (ESLI) which visually indicate when filters must be changed.
- ▶ Leave the area immediately if (1) while wearing a filter or cartridge respirator you can smell, taste, or otherwise detect **Mercuric Oxide**, (2) while wearing particulate filters abnormal resistance to breathing is experienced, or (3) eye irritation occurs while wearing a full facepiece respirator. Check to make sure the respirator-to-face seal is still good. If it is, replace the filter or cartridge. If the seal is no longer good, you may need a new respirator.
- ▶ Consider all potential sources of exposure in your workplace. You may need a combination of filters, prefilters or cartridges to protect against different forms of a chemical (such as vapor and mist) or against a mixture of chemicals.
- ▶ Where the potential exists for exposure over **0.5 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** (as *Mercury*), use a NIOSH approved supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece operated in a pressure-demand or other positive-pressure mode. For increased protection use in combination with an auxiliary self-contained breathing apparatus operated in a pressure-demand or other positive-pressure mode.
- ▶ Exposure to **10 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** (as *Mercury*) is immediately dangerous to life and health. If the possibility of exposure above **10 mg/m<sup>3</sup>** exists, use a NIOSH approved self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece operated in a pressure-demand or other positive-pressure mode equipped with an emergency escape air cylinder.

### Fire Hazards

If employees are expected to fight fires, they must be trained and equipped as stated in the OSHA Fire Brigades Standard (29 CFR 1910.156).

- ▶ Extinguish fire using an agent suitable for type of surrounding fire. **Mercuric Oxide** itself does not burn but may intensify a fire.
- ▶ POISONOUS GASES ARE PRODUCED IN FIRE, including *Mercury vapor*.
- ▶ Use water spray to keep fire-exposed containers cool.
- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** may ignite combustibles (wood, paper and oil).

### Spills and Emergencies

If employees are required to clean-up spills, they must be properly trained and equipped. The OSHA Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Standard (29 CFR 1910.120) may apply.

If **Mercuric Oxide** is spilled, take the following steps:

- ▶ Evacuate personnel and secure and control entrance to the area.
- ▶ Eliminate all ignition sources.
- ▶ Use special *Mercury vapor* suppressants or special vacuums for spill collection. Kits specific for clean-up of *Mercury* spills are available.
- ▶ Ventilate and wash area after clean-up is complete.
- ▶ DO NOT wash into sewer.
- ▶ It may be necessary to contain and dispose of **Mercuric Oxide** as a HAZARDOUS WASTE. Contact your state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) or your regional office of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for specific recommendations.

### Handling and Storage

Prior to working with **Mercuric Oxide** you should be trained on its proper handling and storage.

- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** reacts violently with OXIDIZING AGENTS (such as PERCHLORATES, PEROXIDES, PERMANGANATES, CHLORATES, NITRATES, CHLORINE, BROMINE and FLUORINE); COMBUSTIBLES; PETROLEUM HYDROCARBONS; HYDROGEN PEROXIDE; DISULFUR DICHLORIDE; HYDROGEN TRISULFIDE; ACETYL NITRATE; and DIBORON TETRAFLUORIDE.
- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** forms *shock-sensitive compounds* with METALS (such as POTASSIUM, SODIUM, MAGNESIUM and ZINC).
- ▶ **Mercuric Oxide** is not compatible with STRONG ACIDS (such as HYDROCHLORIC, SULFURIC and NITRIC); ETHANOL; and HYDRAZINE HYDRATE.
- ▶ Store in tightly closed containers in a cool, well-ventilated area away from LIGHT and AIR as **Mercuric Oxide** decomposes.

### Occupational Health Information Resources

The New Jersey Department of Health, Occupational Health Service, offers multiple services in occupational health. These services include providing informational resources, educational materials, public presentations, and industrial hygiene and medical investigations and evaluations.

#### For more information, please contact:

New Jersey Department of Health  
 Right to Know Program  
 PO Box 368  
 Trenton, NJ 08625-0368  
 Phone: 609-984-2202  
 Fax: 609-984-7407  
 E-mail: [rtk@doh.nj.gov](mailto:rtk@doh.nj.gov)  
 Web address:  
<http://nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/right-to-know/>

*The Right to Know Hazardous Substance Fact Sheets are not intended to be copied and sold for commercial purposes.*

## GLOSSARY

**ACGIH** is the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists. They publish guidelines called Threshold Limit Values (TLVs) for exposure to workplace chemicals.

**Acute Exposure Guideline Levels (AEGs)** are established by the EPA. They describe the risk to humans resulting from once-in-a-lifetime, or rare, exposure to airborne chemicals.

**Boiling point** is the temperature at which a substance can change its physical state from a liquid to a gas.

A **carcinogen** is a substance that causes cancer.

The **CAS number** is unique, identifying number, assigned by the Chemical Abstracts Service, to a specific chemical.

**CFR** is the Code of Federal Regulations, which are the regulations of the United States government.

A **combustible** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that will burn.

A **corrosive** substance is a gas, liquid or solid that causes destruction of human skin or severe corrosion of containers.

**DEP** is the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

**DOT** is the Department of Transportation, the federal agency that regulates the transportation of chemicals.

**EPA** is the Environmental Protection Agency, the federal agency responsible for regulating environmental hazards.

**ERG** is the Emergency Response Guidebook. It is a guide for emergency responders for transportation emergencies involving hazardous substances.

**Emergency Response Planning Guideline (ERPG)** values are intended to provide estimates of concentration ranges where one reasonably might anticipate observing adverse effects.

A **fetus** is an unborn human or animal.

A **flammable** substance is a solid, liquid, vapor or gas that will ignite easily and burn rapidly.

The **flash point** is the temperature at which a liquid or solid gives off vapor that can form a flammable mixture with air.

**IARC** is the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a scientific group.

**Ionization Potential** is the amount of energy needed to remove an electron from an atom or molecule. It is measured in electron volts.

**IRIS** is the Integrated Risk Information System database maintained by federal EPA. The database contains information on human health effects that may result from exposure to various chemicals in the environment.

**LEL or Lower Explosive Limit**, is the lowest concentration of a combustible substance (gas or vapor) in the air capable of continuing an explosion.

**mg/m<sup>3</sup>** means milligrams of a chemical in a cubic meter of air. It is a measure of concentration (weight/volume).

A **mutagen** is a substance that causes mutations. A **mutation** is a change in the genetic material in a body cell. Mutations can lead to birth defects, miscarriages, or cancer.

**NFPA** is the National Fire Protection Association. It classifies substances according to their fire and explosion hazard.

**NIOSH** is the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. It tests equipment, evaluates and approves respirators, conducts studies of workplace hazards, and proposes standards to OSHA.

**NTP** is the National Toxicology Program which tests chemicals and reviews evidence for cancer.

**OSHA** is the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which adopts and enforces health and safety standards.

**PEOSHA** is the New Jersey Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Act, which adopts and enforces health and safety standards in public workplaces.

**Permeated** is the movement of chemicals through protective materials.

**PIH** is a DOT designation for chemicals which are Poison Inhalation Hazards.

**ppm** means parts of a substance per million parts of air. It is a measure of concentration by volume in air.

A **reactive** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that releases energy under certain conditions.

**STEL** is a Short Term Exposure Limit which is usually a 15-minute exposure that should not be exceeded at any time during a work day.

A **teratogen** is a substance that causes birth defects by damaging the fetus.

**UEL or Upper Explosive Limit** is the highest concentration in air above which there is too much fuel (gas or vapor) to begin a reaction or explosion.

**Vapor Density** is the ratio of the weight of a given volume of one gas to the weight of another (usually *Hydrogen*), at the same temperature and pressure.

The **vapor pressure** is a measure of how readily a liquid or a solid mixes with air at its surface. A higher vapor pressure indicates a higher concentration of the substance in air and therefore increases the likelihood of breathing it in.

Common Name: **MERCURIC OXIDE**

Synonyms: Yellow Oxide of Mercury; Mercury Monoxide

CAS No: 21908-53-2

Molecular Formula: HgO

RTK Substance No: 2537

Description: Yellow to orange-yellow, odorless, crystalline powder

## HAZARD DATA

Hazard Rating	Firefighting	Reactivity
<p><b>3 - Health</b></p> <p><b>0 - Fire</b></p> <p><b>0 - Reactivity</b></p> <p><b>DOT#:</b> UN 1641</p> <p><b>ERG Guide #:</b> 151</p> <p><b>Hazard Class:</b> 6.1 (Poison)</p>	<p>Extinguish fire using an agent suitable for type of surrounding fire. <b>Mercuric Oxide</b> itself does not burn but may intensify a fire.</p> <p>POISONOUS GASES ARE PRODUCED IN FIRE, including <i>Mercury vapor</i>.</p> <p>Use water spray to keep fire-exposed containers cool.</p> <p><b>Mercuric Oxide</b> may ignite combustibles (wood, paper and oil).</p>	<p><b>Mercuric Oxide</b> reacts violently with OXIDIZING AGENTS (such as PERCHLORATES, PEROXIDES, PERMANGANATES, CHLORATES, NITRATES, CHLORINE, BROMINE and FLUORINE); COMBUSTIBLES; PETROLEUM HYDROCARBONS; HYDROGEN PEROXIDE; DISULFUR DICHLORIDE; HYDROGEN TRISULFIDE; ACETYL NITRATE; and DIBORON TETRAFLUORIDE.</p> <p><b>Mercuric Oxide</b> forms <i>shock-sensitive compounds</i> with METALS (such as POTASSIUM, SODIUM, MAGNESIUM and ZINC).</p> <p><b>Mercuric Oxide</b> is not compatible with STRONG ACIDS (such as HYDROCHLORIC, SULFURIC and NITRIC); ETHANOL; and HYDRAZINE HYDRATE.</p>

## SPILL/LEAKS

**Isolation Distance:**

Spills: 25 meters (75 feet)

Fire: 800 meters (1/2 mile)

Use special *Mercury vapor* suppressants or special vacuums for spill collection.

DO NOT wash into sewer.

Will accumulate in aquatic organisms.

Severe marine pollutant.

## PHYSICAL PROPERTIES

**Odor Threshold:** Odorless

**Flash Point:** Noncombustible

**Specific Gravity:** 11.1 (water =1)

**Water Solubility:** Very slightly soluble

**Boiling Point:** Decomposes

**Melting Point:** Decomposes at 932°F (500°C)

**Molecular Weight:** 216.54

## EXPOSURE LIMITS

**OSHA:** 0.1 mg/m<sup>3</sup>, 8-hr TWA

**NIOSH:** 0.05 mg/m<sup>3</sup>, 10-hr TWA; 0.1 mg/m<sup>3</sup>, Ceiling

**ACGIH:** 0.025 mg/m<sup>3</sup>, 8-hr TWA

**IDLH:** 10 mg/m<sup>3</sup>

**PAC** PAC-1 = 1.5 mg/m<sup>3</sup>; PAC-2 = 16 mg/m<sup>3</sup>;

**LEVELS:** PAC-3 = 30 mg/m<sup>3</sup>

## PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

**Gloves:** Silver Shield®/4H®

**Coveralls:** DuPont Tychem® Polycoat, QC, CPF 1, SL and CPF 2; Kappler® Zytron® 300; and Saint-Gobain OneSUIT® TEC

**Respirator:** >0.05 mg/m<sup>3</sup> - APR with filter specific for *Mercury*  
>0.5 mg/m<sup>3</sup> - Supplied air

## HEALTH EFFECTS

**Eyes:** Irritation and burns

**Skin:** Irritation and burns, skin rash, itching and gray skin color

**Inhalation:** Nose, throat and lung irritation with coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath

Nausea, vomiting and tremors

## FIRST AID AND DECONTAMINATION

**Remove** the person from exposure.

**Flush** eyes with large amounts of water for at least 15 minutes. Remove contact lenses if worn. Seek medical attention immediately.

**Quickly** remove contaminated clothing and wash contaminated skin with large amounts of soap and water. Seek medical attention immediately.

**Transfer** to a medical facility.