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## **NATIONAL SURVEY FINDS MOST HOSPITALS ELIMINATING MERCURY**

### **Major health care industry trend toward safer alternatives detected**

September 27, 2005, Phoenix, AZ – Hospitals have significantly reduced the amount of mercury found in facilities and are demonstrating a clear preference for safer alternatives, according to a recent national survey by the American Hospital Association (AHA) and Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E).

Survey highlights:

- 97 percent of hospital respondents across the country were aware of the problem with mercury and had taken steps to address the issue, including labeling mercury-containing devices and phasing out their purchase in favor of safer, equally effective alternatives;
- 80 percent of respondents had completely eliminated the use of mercury fever thermometers;
- 73 percent had removed all mercury sphygmomanometers from their facilities, more than 81% currently purchase mercury-free cleaning chemicals, and 64% purchase mercury-free pharmaceuticals;
- 60 percent of respondents had implemented a mercury management policy, and more than 54% had established a policy to virtually eliminate mercury facility-wide.

"More than 1,000 hospitals across the U.S. have pledged to virtually eliminate mercury medical devices. More than 90% of pharmacy chains have stopped selling mercury fever thermometers. Three of the five largest health care group purchasing organizations now have mercury-free purchasing policies. This survey reveals a deep shift in the culture of the industry," said Laura Brannen, executive director of Hospitals for a Healthy Environment. "Hospitals have recognized that they shouldn't be contributing to the serious public health threat caused by mercury pollution. We now have the opportunity to build on the tremendous work that's been accomplished to finish eliminating mercury from the delivery of health care, making it safer and healthier for all of us."

Mercury is a persistent toxic chemical that builds up in the environment and our bodies. It is passed from mother to child across the placenta and via breast milk, posing particularly high risks for the fetus and young child. Exposure can affect the brain, spinal cord, kidneys and liver. Currently 48 states have fishing advisories due to dangerous levels of mercury pollution. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 8 women in the U.S. has a blood mercury level high enough to impact fetal development.

The recent survey is part of H2E's commitment to assessing the impact of its mercury elimination efforts in the sector. Since 1998, H2E has been providing technical assistance and information to the health care field on mercury elimination, waste reduction, and toxics use reduction. Over that time, the market for mercury-containing medical products has been all but eliminated and the amount of mercury entering health care has sharply decreased. In the last seven years, more than 86 hospitals have received the H2E "Making Medicine Mercury Free" Award for their mercury elimination efforts, and more than 1,000 have pledged to go virtually mercury-free with H2E's assistance.

"Much progress has been made but there is still work to be done," said Mac Robinson, a vice president for the American Hospital Association. "The survey identifies areas where more education is needed. We're committed to working with H2E and the EPA to promote environmental stewardship by providing hospitals with information and tools to reach the goal of virtual elimination of mercury and waste reduction."

For more on the state of mercury in health care, read the "Making Medicine Mercury Free" report based on the data gathered by the 2005 AHA-H2E survey at [www.h2e-online.org/pubs/mercuryreport.pdf](http://www.h2e-online.org/pubs/mercuryreport.pdf).

H2E is creating a national movement for environmental sustainability in health care. It is a free and voluntary joint project of the US Environmental Protection Agency, the American Hospital Association, the American Nurses Association and Health Care Without Harm. For more, visit [www.h2e-online.org](http://www.h2e-online.org).

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