Japan's initiative for adoption of the Minamata Convention on Mercury

The Minamata disease, officially acknowledged in 1956, is an environmental pollution and health damage caused by industrial wastewater contaminated with methylmercury*.
Wishing not to ever repeat such a problem of mercury pollution, the Minamata Convention on Mercury was adopted at a diplomatic conference held in Kumamoto and Minamata in October 2013 for promoting collective global efforts on mercury management.

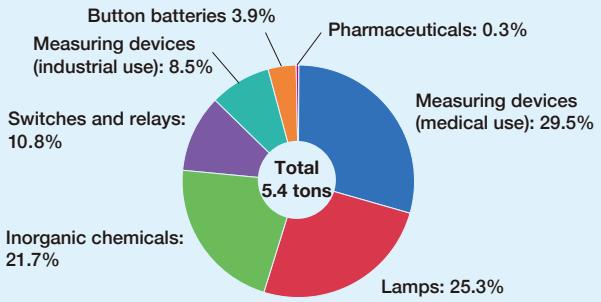
* A type of mercury compounds

Our actions that can protect the Earth from mercury pollution

Mercury is used for various purposes, mainly in developing countries.
Meanwhile, mercury use has decreased significantly in Japan compared with the past, but it is still used in some products.

To prevent global mercury pollution, everybody in the world, including ourselves, should take actions to reduce mercury emissions.

Use of mercury in Japan



Source: Material flow of mercury in Japan (FY2014 basis) (2017, Ministry of the Environment)

Kumamon! Tell us about mercury.

Mercury Q&A for mums and kids

Q: Firstly, what is mercury?

A: It's a metal, like iron, gold and silver.
Mercury is the only metal that is in a liquid form at room temperature.
We can find it in fluorescent lamps, mercury thermometers, mercury blood pressure meters, and some batteries.

Q: Why do we have to be careful with mercury?

A: Once released into the environment, mercury circulates globally and may be taken up by marine species like fish. If a person eats such fish, mercury could harm the person's health.

Q: What is the Minamata Convention? What can we do at home?

A: It's an agreement by the countries to work together to not pollute the Earth with mercury. Disposing of mercury-containing products properly at home is very important.

Q: What is the Minamata disease like?

A: It's a disease for people who ate fish contaminated with methylmercury that was in wastewater released from a factory and then accumulated in fish.

Q: What did we learn from the Minamata disease?

A: We learned that we have to preserve the nature.
If we pollute it, the effect comes right back at us.

Your Little Finger
Can Move the Earth

To Prevent Global Mercury Pollution

環境省
Ministry of the Environment

The sea in front of you is open to the Seven Seas

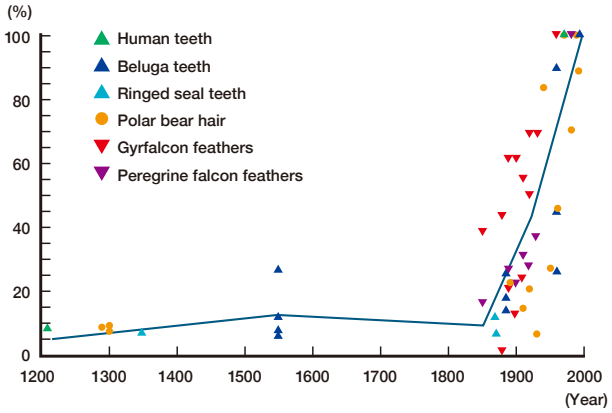
Mercury is the only metallic element that is in a liquid form at room temperature (20°C). It is highly volatile, and once released into the environment, it does not decompose and circulate globally. It can be absorbed by marine organisms.*

Mercury is released into the environment through natural processes such as volcanic activity. But human activities increased the mercury releases. Reducing such release is extremely important to reduce the total amount of mercury circulating globally.

* The toxicity of mercury varies depending on the chemical form, but methylmercury, in particular, is known to be highly toxic to the central nervous system of humans, and developing fetuses are most susceptible to it.

Assimilated mercury trend in animal species over time

Historical mercury concentration as a proportion of present-day



Source: Global Mercury Assessment 2013 (UNEP, 2013)

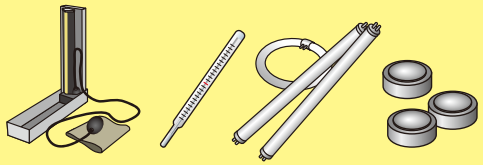
* Recent studies on marine organisms, particularly in the Arctic, revealed that mercury concentrations in these organisms substantially increased compared to the pre-industrial period (i.e., before 1800).

Actions to be taken at home

1 Please learn about mercury-using products and use them properly

It is important to know about mercury-using products around us and use them properly within the intended purposes so that mercury does not leak out.

- Major mercury-using products in the households -



Mercury sphygmomanometer | Mercury thermometer | Fluorescent lamps | Some button batteries

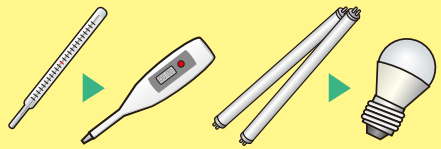
The Japan Lighting Manufacturers Association provides an information material on its website page that helps identifying lamps containing mercury: "Sorting and Disposal of Mercury-containing Lamps for household".

Japan Lighting Manufacturers Association Website
http://www.jlma.or.jp/kankyo/suigin/katei.htm [in Japanese]

2 Please consider replacing to mercury-free alternative products

You may consider purchasing mercury-free alternative products when replacing mercury-using products.

- Examples of alternative products -



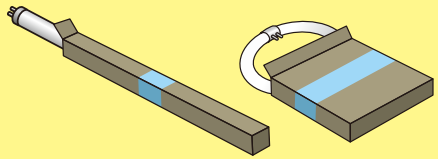
Mercury thermometer → Electronic thermometer | Fluorescent lamps → LED lamp

* Based on the Minamata Convention, the manufacture and import of mercury-using products will be regulated in Japan in 2017 or 2020, but these regulations will not prohibit the use of products already in use at home.

3 Please dispose of mercury-using products in accordance with local rules

When disposing of mercury-using products, you should handle them without allowing any leakage of mercury. Please dispose of such products according to the rules of the local government of your residence.

- Examples of proper disposal -



For fragile objects such as fluorescent lamps or mercury thermometers, you may put them back in the original packages or other protective boxes.

Button battery collection cans

As a voluntary industry initiative, the Battery Association of Japan collects used button batteries including mercury-containing ones in collection cans located at about 14,000 appliance stores and hearing aid stores throughout Japan in order to carry out appropriate disposal. The locations of the stores with these collection cans can be checked on the Battery Association of Japan website.

Battery Association of Japan Website
http://www.botankaishu.jp/m/top.php [in Japanese]

* For safety, insulate each battery before dropping it into the collection can with adhesive tape around it.

'Don'ts' for mercury disposal