



# Sustainable Hospitals Project

A Project of the Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, University of Massachusetts Lowell

## Mercury in Eye Surgery Settings

Is there mercury hiding in your clinic or office?

Mercury has a history of use in eye surgery, where little bags of mercury were used as weights to apply pressure to the eye prior to cataract surgery. The formal name for this type of device is an **intraocular pressure reducer**. Mercury weights are no longer commercially available, and the practice of weighting the eye prior to cataract surgery is largely obsolete because of newer techniques and minimally invasive tools for surgery. Even so, a few facilities still use mercury weights or may have the mercury bags left behind in drawers or cabinets. Here are several suggestions for facilities that still have mercury intraocular pressure reducers.

- 1) Remove and recycle the mercury devices, to keep the mercury out of the environment. A list of mercury recyclers is available at the Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E) website:  
<http://www.h2e-online.org/tools/mercury.htm>
- 2) If surgeons still use intraocular weights, investigate new tools and techniques. This can be done through continuing education programs (such as those offered by professional societies), by researching peer-reviewed journal articles, and/or by contacting the manufacturer of your surgical tools for technical assistance.
- 3) Surgeons can consider using a mercury free alternative called the Honan Intraocular Pressure Reducer ([www.honanballoon.com](http://www.honanballoon.com)). There are reports of practitioners replacing mercury bags with Honans and then eliminating intraocular pressure reducers entirely. A journal article on this topic is "Necessity of the Honan intraocular pressure reducer in cataract surgery using topical anesthesia"<sup>1</sup>.

In any situation, it is important to always evaluate new products and practices carefully to assess safety and performance in your own setting. For more information about mercury elimination and alternative products, visit the Sustainable Hospitals website at <http://www.sustainablehospitals.org> or contact SHP at [shp@uml.edu](mailto:shp@uml.edu) or 978-934-3386.

### Reference:

<sup>1</sup> EH Black EH; Cohen KL; Tripoli NK; Winslow PA 3rd, "Necessity of the Honan intraocular pressure reducer in cataract surgery using topical anesthesia", J Cataract Refract Surg, 1999 Feb; 25 (2), pp 223-6