

Dorothy Wilson
26 Sequoyah Blvd.
Shawnee, OK 74801

Dear Ms. Wilson:

Thank you for your letter of August 13, 1999 to Administrator Browner about automatic shut-off irons that contain mercury. We appreciate your concern about the safe disposal of mercury.

There are many EPA programs that focus on preventing toxic substances such as mercury from polluting the environment. We do encourage manufacturers to design safer products, and to reduce the amount of toxic chemicals that they use. We also encourage companies to substitute other chemicals that are safer whenever they can.

The Federal government is one of the largest consumers of products in the country. How we spend our money makes a big impact on manufacturers and the economy. For that reason, and also to set an example for the rest of the country, the Federal government tries to buy items that are made from recycled materials and that do not harm the environment.

Despite all our efforts, there are still some items that must be disposed of, and that contain hazardous chemicals. When these items come from households, we refer to them as household hazardous wastes. EPA and State programs are working to ensure that landfills are designed properly so that when household hazardous wastes are disposed of, they will not pollute groundwater and surface water. Because modern landfills are carefully designed and monitored, it should be safe for you to dispose of your irons in the landfill.

Also, many States and communities collect household hazardous wastes so they can dispose of them safely. If you would like information on Oklahoma's programs, you could contact Bryce Hulsey, of the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality. He can be reached at (405) 702-5170. In addition, Emily Moore, of the

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Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance is an expert on mercury in products. She can be reached at (651) 215-0201.

I have enclosed two documents that EPA has written about household hazardous waste in case you would like to read more about our efforts. You can also get more information about these and other pollution prevention programs at EPA's website: <http://www.epa.gov/p2/programs.htm>.

Thank you again for your concern about reducing mercury and other toxic substances in the environment. We will continue to do all that we can to prevent such pollution. I hope this information will be helpful to you.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Cotsworth, Director
Office of Solid Waste

Enclosures

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