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What is Azogue/Vidajan?
Azogue is Spanish and Vidajan is Haitian Creole for metallic mercury also known as quicksilver in English.

Metallic mercury is a very toxic, silver-gray liquid metal.

- It does not dissolve in water or alcohol.
- It has no smell but has a metallic taste.
- It can be a liquid or a vapor at room temperature.
- It can remain where spilled for several months.
- It evaporates in air.
- Its vapors cannot be seen.

ALL TYPES OF MERCURY ARE TOXIC.

Azogue/Vidajan is found in thermometers used to measure body temperature, some paints (made before 1991), electrical switches, thermostats and batteries. It is also sold in botánicas in capsules in amounts ranging from a few grams to 3-5 ounces for spiritual “works” (trabajos).
An azogue/vidajan capsule can contain up to 10 times more mercury than one thermometer.

The mercury vapor from these capsules is heavier than air, so the vapor tends to settle near the floor. Children may be at a greater risk of breathing in the vapor, because they may crawl and play on floors.

WHAT IS AZOGUE/VIDAJAN USED FOR?

Some people use azogue/vidajan in traditional medicine or for spiritual/religious purposes, such as:

- to cleanse or protect the home
- to cure stomach ailments
- for spiritual cleansing
- for protection and to increase good fortune
- to offer petitions to the Yoruba gods
- for love spells

When used for spiritual/religious purposes, azogue/vidajan has been:

- placed in floor washes or sprinkled onto the floor
- applied to the skin or used in baths
- swallowed
- placed in oil lamps or candles
- kept inside vials or charm bags as amulets

IS THERE A SAFE WAY TO USE AZOGUE/VIDAJAN?

NO! There is always a risk of breathing azogue vapors when it is used in any way.

- Azogue/Vidajan is dangerous when inhaled. It can also be harmful when swallowed or applied to the skin.

- Azogue/Vidajan gets into carpets, draperies, furniture, and cracks in the floors when spilled. It can stay in a room for months or years.

- You won’t know how often you are breathing azogue/vidajan vapor because you cannot see or smell it.
HOW CAN AZOGUE/VIDAJAN AFFECT YOUR HEALTH?

- Azogue/Vidajan can stay in your kidneys and brain for months. The most affected part of the body is the nervous system.

- Azogue/Vidajan can cause permanent damage to the brain and kidneys. It can harm the developing baby, and may even cause death.

- The health effects depend on how much and for how long a person has had contact with azogue/vidajan.

**Signs and Symptoms of Azogue/Vidajan (Metallic Mercury) Poisoning:**

- tremors
- irritability and shyness
- redness and swelling of the mouth and gums
- memory loss
- headache
- tiredness and difficulty sleeping
- depression
- loss of appetite and weight loss
- eye and skin irritation
- respiratory failure and death (after very high exposures)

- It may take a long time for signs and symptoms to develop. For this reason, poisoning may be difficult to diagnose.

- Tell your doctor if you experience any of these signs and symptoms. Also let your doctor know if you use azogue/vidajan (metallic mercury).

**Health Effects on Children**

*Azogue/Vidajan is most dangerous to the unborn child and small children.*

Vapors breathed in by pregnant women can enter the developing baby. Azogue/vidajan can also be passed to an infant through the mother’s breast milk.
Toddlers who crawl on floors where azogue/vidajan has been spread may breathe it in or may swallow it. This exposure can cause brain damage that may lead to behavioral and learning problems.

The younger the child, the greater the risk of long-term effects.

Children are more affected by mercury than adults. Some children exposed to azogue/vidajan can develop a condition called acrodynia or pink disease.

Signs and Symptoms of Acrodynia in Children:
◆ severe leg cramps
◆ irritability
◆ numbness, prickling or tingling
◆ painful pink fingers
◆ peeling hands, feet and nose
◆ rash
◆ heavy sweating
◆ sensitivity to light

WHAT CAN BE USED INSTEAD OF AZOGUE/VIDAJAN?

Botánicas have substitutes for azogue/vidajan.

Alternatives to azogue/vidajan can be found in books sold in botánicas. You can also ask an espiritista, santero or doktè fey to suggest other things that may be used in place of azogue/vidajan.

HOW TO MEASURE THE AMOUNT OF AZOGUE/VIDAJAN IN THE BODY OR HOME

The only way to know if there are azogue/vidajan vapors in the home is to test for it with special equipment, such as a mercury detector (mercury vapor analyzer) that measures the level of azogue/vidajan in the air in the home. For more information about mercury air testing, call the New York City Department of Health.

There are laboratory tests that measure the level of azogue/vidajan in urine and blood. A urine test is the best way to measure for exposure to
azogue/vidajan (metallic mercury). If you
think you have been exposed and need
testing, call your doctor or the New York City
Department of Health.

HOW TO CLEAN UP AZOGUE/VIDAJAN

When azogue/vidajan is spilled, it breaks
apart into tiny silver beads that roll around
and stick to surfaces and get in cracks.

Do not use a vacuum cleaner, broom, or mop to collect
spilled azogue/vidajan. Brooms and mops will spread
the azogue/vidajan beads and a vacuum will heat the
azogue/vidajan, causing it to
give off DANGEROUS vapors.

Do not throw azogue/vidajan down sinks,
toilets or bathtub drains. The azogue/vidajan
may become trapped, then evaporate and
re-enter the home.

Small amounts of azogue/vidajan (like the
amount found in thermometers—about 4.5 grams)
can be cleaned up from surfaces like tile,
wood, or linoleum floors. If azogue/vidajan
has been spilled or placed on carpets,
upholstery or other porous surfaces, throw
them away if possible, or clean them using
mercury spill kits and detergents.

Do not attempt to clean-up large amounts of
mercury (more than the amount found in a
fever thermometer) yourself.

Method for Clean-up of SMALL (less than 5
grams) amounts of spilled azogue/vidajan
(metallic mercury).

→ Keep children and pets away from the
area before and during clean-up.

→ Remove gold jewelry. Mercury can
damage gold items.

1. Have ready 4-5 sealable plastic bags
(preferably ziplock), a trash bag, rubber or
latex gloves, paper towels, cardboard or
squeegee, an eyedropper, wide tape and a
flashlight.
2. Put on rubber or latex gloves.

3. Carefully pick up any pieces of broken glass (from a thermometer or vial). Place them on a paper towel and put the towel in a zip lock bag to be thrown away.

4. Use stiff cardboard or a rubber squeegee to collect the silver beads in one place. (Use a flashlight to help you look for azogue/vidaján beads). Remember to look all around the area because the beads can stick to surfaces and get into cracks in the floor!

5. Use an eye dropper to carefully draw up the azogue/vidaján beads. Slowly squeeze the beads onto a damp paper towel. Put the towel in a zip lock bag to be sealed and thrown away.

6. Use the sticky side of wide tape to pick up any remaining glass and azogue/vidaján beads. When done, place the tape containing glass and azogue/vidaján into a zip lock bag.

7. When all visible pieces have been picked up and clean-up is done, place the cardboard or squeegee into a zip lock bag for disposal.

8. Carefully remove rubber gloves and place them in a zip lock bag.

9. Put the sealed zip locked bags in a sealed garbage bag and dispose with regular household trash.

→ If possible, open a window for 24 to 48 hours in the room where the azogue/vidaján was spilled to ventilate the area after the clean-up has been completed.

→ Do not vacuum area until 2-3 days after the clean-up. Make sure there are no beads of azogue/vidaján left before vacuuming! After this you may vacuum the area as needed.

It can be very difficult to completely remove azogue/vidaján beads that have made their way into cracked surfaces, such as wood, linoleum, ceramic or parquet floor tiles.

Mercury spill kits can be used to clean up spills. These kits are sold by safety equipment distributors, industrial safety supplies outlets, or laboratory safety services (check under environmental and ecological products and services or laboratory safety services in phone books).

If there is a large amount of mercury (more than the amount found in a fever thermometer) in your home or business and you want to dispose of it, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) can recycle the mercury. Please call the Department of Environmental Protection during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM) at 718-595-4784 to find out more about recycling mercury.

If a large amount of mercury has been spilled in your home or business, please call the New York City Department of Health Poison Control Center or the New York City Department of Environmental Protection.

NYC Department of Health
Poison Control Center:
212-764-7667 (24 hours a day)

NYC Department Environmental Protection
718-DEP-HELP (24 hours a day)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have any questions about possible health effects from azogue/vidajan or how to clean up azogue/vidajan from your home, please call the New York City Department of Health.

If you have questions about the disposal of large amounts of mercury (more than the amount found in a fever thermometer), please call the New York City Department of Environmental Protection.

You can also talk to your doctor about azogue/vidajan and ask your santero or espiritista or doktè fey to suggest substitutes for azogue/vidajan.

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Disease Prevention
Information on Health Effects and Clean-up of Mercury
125 Worth St., CN-34Cs
New York, NY 10013
(212) 788-4290 (Monday–Friday, 9 AM–5 PM)

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Poison Control Center
Information on Health Effects and Clean-up of Mercury
455 First Ave. CN-81
New York, NY 10016
(212) 764-7667 (24 hours a day)

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Department of Emergency Response and Technical Assessment
Information on Mercury Recycling
(718) 595-4784 (Monday–Friday, 9 AM–5 PM)

To report a large mercury spill
(718) DEP-HELP (24 hours a day)