Summary:

The goals of the project were to: 1. Reduce the health and environmental risks of mercury pollution 2. Reduce the time spent cleaning up broken mercury thermometers 3. Educate the campus laboratories about non-toxic alternatives. The project traded mercury thermometers on campus and replaced them with non-toxic alternatives to remove the health and environmental risk from campus. The promotion of the thermometer exchange included educating campus researchers about the dangers of mercury, the high cost of cleaning up spills, and that adequate alternatives do exist. EH&S hired two student interns for the project, Dakota Corey and Jessica Alvarez, who cooperated with the UCSB Laboratory Research And Technical Staff (LabRATS) to promote the project. The LabRATS were very helpful with the educational portion of the program which included a web site, flyers, emails, group presentations and door-to-door promotion.

Rating of Project Success:

The project was successful and exceeded its initial goal of removing and replacing 300 thermometers. The project collected the following devices containing mercury: 810 thermometers, 5 gauges, 2 barometers, and 1 manometer. In return, the Mercury Thermometer Project gave away 388 thermometers (with twelve to still give away). The original project did not anticipate so many laboratories giving up their mercury thermometers without requiring a replacement. This was a welcoming sign that people realize the dangers of mercury thermometers and would rather give them up than hold on to them until they possibly break. If it is assumed that all mercury devices eventually break, it is estimated that the University will save over $44,000 from the success of this project.

Any Pitfalls Encountered:

Outreach and promotion were the most challenging areas of the project. We found that speaking to each laboratory individually was the most effective way to accomplish participation in the program. Sending mass emails to list serves did not produce as many results. Some individuals did not want to participate because they felt that the
temperature accuracy was not as good with the non-mercury replacements and for very high range thermometers there are not very many alternatives.

Budget:

Total Expenses: $6,322.19 (See Submitted Financial Report)
* Many campus employees donated their time and labor for the management of the Mercury Thermometer Exchange Program, as well as the collection and distribution of the thermometers.

Summary of Overall Experience:

This program was very beneficial to the health of the campus community and the local environment. By financially backing the program, the TGIF grant made UCSB a safer place to live and work. Mercury is a toxic substance that contaminates the food chain and bioaccumulates in the tissue of fish, wildlife and humans who eat the fish. This program contributed to the reduction of mercury being released to the environment. Moreover, we believe the educational portion of the program has improved the future purchasing habits of California’s future scientists, encouraging them to buy green whenever possible. It was a great opportunity to work with the interns and other sustainability change agents in a collaborative effort. This has led to new green collaborations with many of the same people.