

NEWS RELEASE

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**Department of Natural Resources Oversees  
Mercury Cleanup at Greene County Elementary School**  
*Exposure Levels Not Likely to Cause Health Concerns for Students*

JEFFERSON CITY, MO, SEPT. 21, 2009 -- Emergency responders from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources will be overseeing the cleanup of a Springfield elementary school classroom where a small mercury release occurred Friday. The Department was notified early this afternoon that a student at Sequiota Elementary School, 3414 Mentor, Springfield, discovered a small bead of mercury in a classroom where a thermometer was broken during class on Friday. School officials reported that the classroom teacher believed that none of the mercury had escaped from the broken instrument and therefore did not report the incident.

Once the student discovered the released mercury, school officials took immediate steps to evacuate the room, wipe down the shoes of each student in the class to prevent the possible contamination of other rooms, shut off the air conditioning unit to the room to prevent the spreading of mercury vapor and opened an exterior window to begin venting vapor from the room. School staff also conducted an initial cleanup of the room.

State on-scene coordinators from the Department's Southwest Regional Office in Springfield were dispatched to the scene this afternoon. Air monitoring in the classroom determined that mercury vapors were present in excess of recommended cleanup levels, prompting the hiring of a contractor to conduct a cleanup of the room under Department supervision.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services and the Greene County Health Department were also notified and have been assisting the school district with health-related questions concerning mercury.

According to the Department of Health and Senior Services' Bureau of Environmental Epidemiology, students' exposure to mercury vapors was not likely high enough to cause anyone to experience adverse health effects. People who are concerned about potential exposures may contact the Bureau of Environmental Epidemiology at 573-751-6102 for more information on mercury exposure or their personal physician for medical concerns.

Metallic mercury is liquid at room temperature and has no odor. It was once commonly used in thermometers, barometers, switches and blood-pressure measuring devices.

When spilled, some of the metal will evaporate into the air and can be carried long distances. Mercury is toxic when inhaled. Improper clean up with a vacuum, paintbrush or household cleaner increases exposure by dispersing the mercury into the air. For more information on cleaning up mercury spills, see the Department's Web site: <http://www.dnr.mo.gov/env/mercury-cleanup.htm>.

To report an environmental emergency, including mercury spills, please the contact the Department of Natural Resources' spill line at 573-634-2436. For more information about the Missouri Department of Natural Resources contact the Department at 800-361-4827 or 573-751-3443, or visit the department's Web page at [www.dnr.mo.gov](http://www.dnr.mo.gov).

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