

Grafton Street Elementary School Accidental Mercury Release Update

Update # 2 – Sunday, September 26, 2010

Background

On Tuesday September 21, 2010, an accidental release of mercury occurred on the third floor at Grafton Street Elementary School Building #2, in Worcester, MA. Approximately 240 students were in the building at the time of the spill. Mercury is a liquid metallic substance, which gives off vapors especially when heated. In this instance, the mercury was not heated. There may be potential harm to children who are exposed to mercury over time. Teams of federal, state, and city, environmental and public health officials have been responding to the incident since Wednesday (September 22, 2010).

School officials requested that all students who were in the building during the incident bring their belongings to school on Thursday (September 23, 2010) for screening. Parents responded very quickly (overnight) to this request and over 200 students voluntarily gave their belongings to officials for screening. The screening identified that some of these belongings measured intermediate to high levels of mercury. As a precautionary measure, environmental and public health officials are offering to conduct follow-up screenings at homes where children's belongings tested positive for mercury (currently 100 residences). Health officials also, with parental consent, tested 185 students' urine for mercury. The results of these tests are expected on Monday, September 27, 2010. **Parents will be notified of all results. .**

Precautionary screening of homes

Teams of federal and state environmental and public health officials are now contacting parents of children whose belongings tested positive for mercury, to request permission to screen their homes or apartments. This precautionary measure is being taken to ensure that mercury did not get transported from children's belongings into their homes. All personnel conducting the home screenings will be environmental and public health workers. These workers will be wearing identification and will request permission to test the home to determine if any elevated levels of mercury exist. The home survey will take approximately one hour. Residents will be informed of the results at the end of the visit and what recommendations should be carried out, if any. **If your residence is not visited you can be assured that your child's belongings bag was free of significant mercury contamination!**

For more information

Call EPA's toll-free hotline at 1-888-372-7341 (888) EPA-Reg1

Worcester Division of Public Health at (508) 799-8531

Worcester Public Schools at 508-326-1282