


STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Safe and Healthy Lives in Safe and Healthy Communities

7 May 2007

Dear School Superintendent:

The recent mercury spill at Cranston High School East demonstrates how vulnerable schools are to chemical spills.

Due to national and state-level concerns regarding chemical safety in school science laboratories, the Rhode Island Departments of Health and Education promulgated *Regulations (R16-21-SCHO)*, which ban mercury and over 800 other chemicals from schools. Despite great progress in improving chemical safety practices, some of the schools in your district may still be using banned chemicals in the following instances:

- Some chemistry AP programs continue to use carcinogenic chromium compounds such as sodium or potassium chromate;
- Some biology programs continue to use specimens preserved in formalin solutions;
- Some general science classes continue to use sodium/potassium metal in demonstrations.

The incident in Cranston offers an opportunity to remind us all that Rhode Island Rules and Regulations for Hazardous Waste Management require proper characterization, storage and disposal of hazardous materials that are no longer in use. The Rhode Island Mercury Education and Reduction Act currently prohibits schools from the purchase of bulk elemental mercury, and prohibits the sale or use of products exceeding 1 gram of mercury. Schools found to be out of compliance with these requirements are subject to administrative penalties.

The best solution to these problems is to ensure that your school system has designated and trained a Chemical Hygiene Officer and that the required chemical hygiene plan is in place. Chemical Hygiene Officers have numerous resources including a website established by the State's Chemical Safe Schools program. This website can be accessed at: <http://www.health.ri.gov/environment/risk/chemicalhygiene/index.php>. We are also exploring additional ways to provide outreach opportunities on these issues to Rhode Island schools and the public.

For more information about complying with the regulations, please contact Robert Vanderslice, PhD, Healthy Environment Team Leader (401-222-7766 or Robert.Vanderslice@health.ri.gov).

Sincerely,



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