

Vacuumed mercury forces school evacuation

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School officials in Rockford, Ill., learned that vacuuming mercury, while fast, isn't healthy.

District school officials said they plan to meet with county health officials to review what happened when after a middle school teacher found mercury leaking from an old thermometer in a closet, the Rockford (Ill.) Register-Star said. School personnel vacuumed a carpet where some of the potentially toxic metal was found, possibly putting mercury vapor in the air.

The leak was discovered Tuesday when teachers reported, but students did not, the Register-Star said. A school district environmental specialist was not available, the newspaper said, but school personnel cleaned the area properly.

When more mercury was found on a hallway carpet and vacuumed Wednesday, the district environmentalist was involved and the school contacted the Environmental Protection Agency and county health officials, the newspaper said.

The school on Wednesday evacuated about 750 students, who left their shoes behind for testing. School was back in session Thursday, after officials determined air quality was normal and students' shoes tested negative for mercury contamination.

About a tablespoon of liquid mercury leaked, officials said.

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