



April 5, 2007

## **NEWS RELEASE**

Riverside County

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Students in Romoland relocated due to possible mercury contamination**

**Riverside County** – The staff and 951 students at Harvest Valley Elementary School in Romoland were relocated from the school today (April 5) as a precautionary measure based on recommendations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) until officials could confirm that a cleanup of mercury on campus was adequate.

Elemental mercury was confiscated from two students yesterday after it was discovered by school officials. School officials reported that the mercury on campus had been cleaned up by a private contractor. School officials notified county hazardous-materials, who directed them to bring in a contractor to conduct the cleanup.

Based on the type of mercury found, county public health officials continue to believe that the risk of exposure to students and their families is very low. Officials are not aware of any students becoming ill. The students and staff were relocated as a precautionary measure and so that additional cleanup could occur. The EPA is the lead agency on the cleanup, which will include additional sampling and air monitoring.

School officials have canceled classes at the school tomorrow (Friday) based on recommendations from county and federal officials. The school is closed for spring break next week. Parents will be notified by the school district's system, School Messenger, of the closure. Parents seeking additional information should contact the district at (951) 926-9244.

According to the EPA, primary health effects of mercury result when it is breathed as a vapor and absorbed through the lungs. These exposures can occur when elemental

mercury is spilled and is exposed to the air, particularly in warm or poorly ventilated indoor spaces. Symptoms of mercury exposure include: tremors, emotional changes, insomnia, muscle weakness, headaches, shortness of breath, chest tightness and disturbances in sensations. Parents concerned that their child may have been exposed should contact their physician; however, public health officials believe that the exposure risk was very low.

“Although the risk of exposure was very low, it is always better to err on the side of caution,” said Dr. Eric Frykman, the county public health officer.

The county Environmental Health and Public Health departments are working with EPA, Riverside County Fire Department, Riverside County and school officials to continue monitoring the situation. For additional information on mercury and its effects, visit the EPA website at <http://www.epa.gov/mercury/effects.htm#elem>.

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