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Evaluation of the Impact and Effectiveness of the “Reducing Mercury in Schools” Brochure Series

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Elemental mercury is a neurotoxin that is readily absorbed through inhalation and can damage the nervous system and the kidneys. Exposure of children to mercury is especially a concern because their systems are developing. In schools, mercury may be found in many places such as science classrooms, storage areas, gymnasiums and boiler rooms. In response to the need for mercury education in schools, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) collaborated with various governmental agencies, activist and public interest organizations, and individual school representatives to form the ‘Partnership to Reduce Mercury in Schools.’ The Hazardous Substances Emergency Events Surveillance (HSEES) program at NYSDOH participated in the Partnership and helped coordinate the development of a nine-brochure series entitled “Reducing Mercury in Schools.” (<http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/chemicals/hsees/mercury/index.htm>). The brochure series, which includes five audience-specific brochures and an inventory tool, provides information and practical ways of identifying, reducing and removing mercury from schools. In 2005 and 2006, more than 110,000 brochures were distributed to all public and non-public schools in New York State. Last year, a 17-question survey form was created to evaluate the effectiveness of the brochures and determine if the educational campaign about mercury and mercury spills had impacted school policies or staff training. The results of the survey, taken from May 2007 to January 2008, and recommendations for future action for aiding schools to prevent mercury spills will be presented.