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News Release

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Mercury Collection Event Scheduled in Broken Arrow

A mercury spill can poison people and devastate property. Broken Arrow area residents will have a chance to safely dispose of any mercury or mercury-containing devices for free. The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will accept mercury from the public on Saturday, February 25 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Central on Main, located at 210 N. Main Street in Broken Arrow. People can bring liquid mercury and mercury-containing devices such as: thermometers, thermostats, and switches. Fluorescent lamps will also be accepted. Citizens who bring in mercury thermostats will be given a \$10 gift card per household from Covanta. Place containers of liquid mercury in sealed plastic bags to prevent accidental spills that can contaminate a car.

The collection event was triggered by a residential mercury spill in Broken Arrow that occurred last year. A resident spilled a vial of mercury in August and cleaned it up improperly causing toxic mercury vapor to spread throughout the rest of the house. DEQ was contacted about the incident in December. DEQ tested the house and found such high levels in the air that it requested immediate assistance from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The resident was forced to move out of the residence during the clean up.

Liquid mercury vaporizes at room temperature making the air unsafe to breathe, especially for children playing on the floor. It is absorbed by porous materials such as carpet, wood, flooring, and walls. Attempts to vacuum it only spread the contamination.

Mercury poisoning can permanently damage the brain, lungs, kidneys, and developing fetuses. Exposure to high levels can cause respiratory failure and death.

Many people have containers of liquid mercury as a curiosity, unaware of its health threat. It was also used in thermometers, barometers, thermostats, gas meters, batteries, and paint. Those uses have been phased out, but it is still used in fluorescent lamps.

Residents who miss the Broken Arrow collection event can safely get rid of liquid mercury or mercury products at the Tulsa Household Pollutant Collection Facility (cityoftulsa.org), or at collection events sponsored by the Metropolitan Environmental Trust (metrecycle.com). For opportunities to recycle fluorescent bulbs, please visit metrecycle.com. For opportunities to recycle mercury thermostats, please visit thermostat-recycle.org.

For more information, contact Fenton Rood with DEQ at (405) 702-5100 or fenton.rood@deq.ok.gov.