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Mercury drive gets an extra day

By Andy Heintz

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Larry Jumper is giving people one more week to get rid of their mercury, an element once used in industrial processes and thought of as something to play with, but now recognized as a deadly pollutant.

Commonly used in electrical switches, thermostats and the like, mercury once was used to shape hats by hand. Its effect on the brain could leave the hatter "mad," as in "Alice in Wonderland."

Jumper director of the Thomas County Landfill, will be accepting mercury-containing items free of charge through Friday at the landfill, 1860 County Road 22. Go two miles east of Colby on U.S. 24 then a quarter mile south across the railroad tracks.

Items Jumper will accept include elemental mercury, mercury-containing devices such as thermometers, barometers, manometers, mercury displacement relays, heating/cooling thermostats and mercury switches. Mercury-carrying items they will not be accepting include mercury salts, fluorescent lights, compact fluorescent bulbs and batteries.

Jumper said he's collecting mercury as part of the Kansas Mercury Sweep Collection program sponsored by the state Department of Health and Environment, which pays some of the cost.

"This year, there were 63 locations throughout the state where people could dispose of mercury-containing items," said Maria Morey, environmental scientist at the department.

The goal is the removal of mercury-containing devices from the Kansas environment. That's im-

portant because of the harmful effects mercury can have on people and wildlife, she said.

Mercury is a highly toxic heavy metal. A liquid, it can enter the body when mercury vapors are inhaled, when mercury is absorbed through the skin, or when people eat food containing mercury.

Prolonged or repeated exposure can lead to irreversible damage to the skin, mucous membranes, nervous system, brain and kidneys. Organic mercury, ingested by eating fish or grain, may cause greater harm to the brain and developing fetuses than kidneys, the state says. Elemental mercury from inhaling mercury vapor may cause greater harm to the brain, while inorganic mercury salts in water supplies and contaminated foods may cause greater harm to the kidneys.

While the sweep collection program was to end last week, Jumper said, he decided to extend it an extra week. He emphasized the moral aspect of disposing mercury in an environmentally friendly way.

Jumper also heads the county's household hazardous waste disposal program, which runs all year long.

That program, he said, allows people to bring household waste to the landfill, where they will be disposed of in a way not harmful to the environment. Items with labels having words like caution, warning or danger on them are usually hazardous, he said.

Household wastes are divided into four categories, he said, paints, household cleaners, pest-control products and automotive products. Examples include batteries, cleaning products, wood preservatives and gasoline.

Disposal of these items is free of charge, Jumper said.

Center's care, feed his job

After feeding the birds this morning (right) at the Colby Visitors Center, Ralph Fischer took time to show a visitor the panoramic photo (above) of our town, taken more than a century ago from the courthouse, inside the center's dome.

Fischer said he's mostly a volunteer, but he does get paid to keep the center, near the K-27 exit from I-70 on Range Ave., clean and tidy.

"I tell people I'm the big shot out here," he said with a grin.

At one time, he added, he had about 40 volunteers working shifts at the center, but it's been getting harder to fill the schedule all the time. He said he usually works mornings and several women take the afternoon shift.

Retired after 40 years in animal-health sales, Fischer has lived in Colby nearly 15 years. The Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau runs the center.



STEVE HAYNES/Colby Free Press

State offers hunter education, safety class

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For kids ready to start hunting — and any adults who don't yet have a card — the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and the Colby Recreation Department will offer hunter education classes next week.

Graduates earn a hunter education card, required for most hunters to buy a license. Classes will be from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday

and next Thursday, Oct. 9, and 8:30 a.m. to noon Saturday, Oct. 11, at the Colby Community Building. The finale will take place Saturday afternoon when students go to go out to the Colby Trap Range and shoot clay pigeons.

Benny Young, enforcement officer for Wildlife and Parks here, will teach the class, along with wildlife biologists Matt Bain and Josh Williams.

People who want to be able to buy a license and legally hunt alone must take this class, Young said.

"It's a federally mandated class," he said. "You need to pass this class before you can get a hunter's license."

"The class will mostly cover hunter safety and hunter ethics," Young said. "We teach basic firearm safety, like knowing their target, knowing what's beyond their target and keeping their muzzle pointed in the right direction."

Students must be at least 11 by Oct. 11 to attend. They may register for the class at the Pirates Den sports shop, 115 S. Franklin Ave.

Briefly

Emergency committee to meet

The Thomas County Local Emergency Planning Committee will meet at noon Thursday in the conference room at the Thomas County Office Complex, 350 S. Range. The agenda includes appointment of officers, planning for a tabletop exercise and an overview of hazardous material incidents. For information, call Susan McMahan, county emergency management director, at (785) 460-4516.

Free early screening offered

Early childhood screening by professionals who know how children grow and learn will be offered Tuesday at the Colby United Methodist Church for infants, toddlers and preschoolers living in the Colby School District. Screeners

will check how well the child talks, feels, learns, gets along with others and how well her or she does things independently. Staff from the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center will be assisting. For an appointment, call nurse Amy Huffles at Colby Elementary School, (875) 460-5111 or 460-5100.

Fly-in breakfast is Saturday

The Friends of the Colby Airport will hold a fly-in and breakfast from 6:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. The Eagle Med King Air, a Kansas Highway Patrol helicopter, experimental aircraft, powered parachutes, antique aircraft and radio-control aircraft are expected at the field. Tandem skydiving and plane rides will be offered. Breakfast will be provided by the Colby Boy Scouts and proceeds from the event will benefit youth groups and the airport. For information, call Mark at 460-4438.

School book fair down to end

The Colby Grade School Parent-Teacher Organization will wrap up its annual Scholastic Book Fair from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday, with the theme "Book Fair Safari - Soma! (Read!) Ota! (Dream!) Kua! (Grow!)" The fair offers new releases, award-winning titles, children's classics, interactive software, adult books and current best sellers.

First childbirth class Thursday

Citizens Medical Center will offer a four-week series of childbirth education classes from 7-10 p.m. on Thursday and on Thursdays Oct. 9, 16 and 23 for women in their last trimester or who are due to deliver before January, along with their labor support partner. For information or to register, call Jeanene Brown in the hospital's education department at (785) 460-4850.

Center serves seniors lunch

The Thomas County Nutrition Center is open to those 60 and older and their guests to have lunch at noon Monday through Friday at the Senior Progress Center in Fike Park. The cost is \$2.50 for those 60 or older and \$4.75 others. Meals can be delivered to those unable to attend or picked up at the center. Reservations for those attending or picking up meals should be made by noon the day before by calling 460-2901.

Scouts out selling popcorn

Colby Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts are selling popcorn door-to-door until Oct. 26. This year's inventory includes microwave popcorn, popping kernels and a variety of tins filled with caramel, chocolate or cheese popcorn. For help, call Gary Schuette, pack leader, at 460-0003.

