

EPA Emergency Response Site Update

Helena Mercury Spill

Operations Period 02: June 2, 2024

Safety Message

Mercury is a contaminant that is toxic to humans at very low levels and is easily spread.

The bathhouse has been cleared for use by guests of the retreat. The garage has been secured as an Exclusion Zone and EPA's response team is blocking a significant portion of the retreat center's parking lot.

[Website](#)

Site Description

On May 30, 2024, an employee picked up an unlabeled bottle while cleaning out a detached garage at a yoga retreat center. The bottle was heavier than expected and slipped from his hand. The bottle hit a work bench and shattered, which resulted in a reported 500mL of mercury being released to the garage (note the response team has already collected more than 500mL of mercury). The employee left the garage, bagged their contaminated clothing just outside the door, walked to a nearby bathhouse and rinsed themselves in a common shower used by guests. Staff at the retreat center closed and isolated the garage before calling the National Response Center.

An EPA response team arrived at the yoga retreat center on May 31, 2024 and initiated a response effort.

Site Objectives

- Safety of the employees of the retreat center, its guests and response personnel is top priority.
- Collect and dispose of recoverable mercury.
- Clear the bathhouse for use (**complete**).
- Clear the garage for use.
- Collect and dispose of a limited amount of hazardous chemicals found at the garage.
- Provide timely and accurate communication of response information to the public and stakeholders.

Operations Period Objectives

1. Maintain exclusion, contaminant reduction and support zones.
2. Continue effort in the garage.

Operations Period Accomplishments

EPA's Response Team worked its way through the garage using vacuums that are specially designed to collect mercury. Most of the items in the garage have been removed from the building. These items were vacuumed, treated with a chemical reagent designed to produce a non-vaporizing sulfide (when it comes in contact with mercury) and then screened. The majority of these items from the garage remain contaminated and are being disposed. A second roll-off should arrive on-Site on June 3.

The bottle of mercury broke next to an overhead garage door. The team vacuumed the overhead door, used plastic sheeting to isolate the door from the outside and carefully cracked the door open. The team then removed and disposed of the rubber seal on the bottom of the overhead door before vacuuming all of the cracks beneath.

The team is still discovering hot spots even towards the very rear of the garage. Screening results from the floor regularly exceed 100,000 nanograms per cubic meter in multiple areas. Vacuuming will continue into the next Operations Period even after every item has been removed. The work bench and shelves where the release happened will be removed. It is likely the drywall behind the work bench will also need to be removed.

Once the garage has been cleared of items, the team will begin applying multiple applications of the mercury decontamination chemical on the floors, overhead garage door and possibly the walls.

The entire process is time-consuming and a patient attention to detail is required.

Searching for beads of mercury in the garage.



Vacuuming work bench where spill occurred and taking readings beneath garage door.



Status of effort in garage.

