



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Residential Mercury Spill Cleanup

Baltimore, Maryland



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 3

February 11, 2013

Mercury Spill Cleanup Begins...

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in cooperation with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), is cleaning up a mercury spill inside a home located on Crowson Avenue, in Baltimore, MD. The cleanup consists of a single house and property.

Mercury is difficult to remove from homes because the liquid beads can get into cracks of hardwood floors and shoe bottoms; and absorb into soft materials such as carpet, clothing and furniture.

It is important to clean up spilled mercury because of the potential health risks posed by long-term exposure to mercury vapors.

The family who lives in the home is temporarily relocated during cleanup activities.

Why the Cleanup Was Needed...

Mercury is a metal that is liquid at room temperature and can roll around as small beads on floors, getting into carpet and the cracks between floorboards. It can also off-gas into mercury vapors. This vapor can cause health problems if high enough amounts come into contact with skin or is breathed in. Some of the potential health problems can include skin rashes, lung damage, nausea and vomiting.

The vapors do not pose a safety problem for other homes in the neighborhood or for people walking down the street.

Work Being Done...

Here are some of the cleanup activities EPA will be doing:

- Testing areas within the house for mercury, including items such as furniture and clothing
- Removing contaminated materials in sealed bags for storage and monitoring (Items will be either cleaned or removed for proper disposal)
- Removing any visible mercury using special vacuum cleaners that are designed to trap mercury beads and vapors
- Scrubbing floors with special cleansers
- Heating / Ventilating the house to help remove mercury vapors
- Monitoring the air with hand-held meters that detect mercury vapors, to help ensure that the cleanup is working
- Confirming that the cleanup is successful with an 8-hour air quality test. (Once the cleanup results are confirmed, the family can return to the house)
- The cleanup is expected to take between 2 – 4 weeks to complete

What To Do If You Spill Mercury...

Mercury can be found in some common household items such as:

- Fever thermometers,
- Thermostats,
- Blood-pressure gauges, and some
- Cooking thermometers

These tools can contain small amounts of mercury that, if broken, could result in a mercury spill inside the home.

The mercury from this spill may have been from a heat generator, formerly attached to the home heating system. See the attached fact sheet for examples of household devices that may contain mercury.

If you find liquid mercury that is not in a sealed container, do not touch it. Call 9-1-1. Be Safe.

For more information about this cleanup project, visit EPA's website at:

www.epaossc.org/crowsonavehg

If you have additional questions, Contact:

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EPA On-Scene Coordinator
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or

Trish Taylor,
EPA Community Involvement Coordinator
(215) 814-5539 or taylor.trish@epa.gov

Background...

EPA began cleanup work on February 4, 2013.

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) contacted EPA after being alerted of the spill by the homeowner.

The problem occurred during plumbing work, while removing an expansion tank formerly connected to the home heating system. The tank apparently contained mercury, which then spilled onto the floor on the second floor.

There was also mercury in a pipe leading to the basement that had been connected to the tank.

Spilled mercury was found in one area of the basement, on the second floor and in the hallways and stairs between the second floor and the front door. Mercury may have also been tracked into an area of the front yard.

Listed below are additional sources of information on potential household hazards

EPA Publications Available On-line

"Protect Your Family From Lead In Your Home"
<http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadpdf.pdf>

"Lead In Your Home: A Parent's Reference Guide"
<http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadrev.pdf>

"Asbestos in the Home: A Homeowners Guide"
<http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/pubs/ashome.html>

"A Citizens Guide to Radon"
<http://www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/citguide.html>

"Before You Tear It Down, Get the Mercury Out."
<http://www.epa.gov/mercury/pdfs/EPA-905-F-11-008.pdf> ***(This document is attached here)***