
Community Update**March 2021**

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and General Electric Company's (GE) contractors have removed the outer roof and windows from Building C at the Vo-Toys site in Harrison, NJ. Building C demolition is scheduled to begin the week of April 5 and will take approximately 3-4 weeks to complete.

During the Building C demolition, EPA and GE contractors are working simultaneously in Building B to prepare it for demolition. Initial tasks in Building B include hazardous waste removal, debris cleanup, asbestos removal, and lead paint removal, followed by mercury removal. Work inside Building B is anticipated to be completed this summer.

EPA and GE contractors continue to use best practices for site safety, including wearing face coverings and other appropriate personal protective equipment for employees, temperature checks of employees, tracking employees who might be ill, and social distancing. EPA is monitoring site operations and the contractor's health and safety practices.

As we continue to adjust to the evolving COVID-19 situation, EPA is taking the necessary steps to ensure that decisions about ongoing cleanup activities at Superfund sites are made with the health and safety of communities, EPA staff, state and tribal partners, and contractors as the priority. EPA will continue to work closely with state and local health officials, and all partners and stakeholders, to make determinations about site work based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It is important to know that during the COVID-19 pandemic, EPA maintains its ability to respond to human health or environmental emergencies at Superfund sites, or in any situation where we are called upon to address immediate risks from releases of chemical, oil, radiological, biological, and other hazardous materials.

Past Activities

EPA has been closely monitoring all cleanup activities at the Vo-Toys site. GE contractors have removed the bulk of the elemental mercury from Building C, as well as the windows and roof in preparation for the building's demolition. Building C materials still carry trace residual mercury contamination, but at levels that are not expected to pose a concern for the community.

EPA continues to carefully monitor the vapor levels along the perimeter of the building and has not seen elevated levels of vapors outside the building. However, if unexpected mercury vapors are encountered, vapor control measures will immediately be implemented. EPA will continue to monitor vapor levels at the work site throughout demolition activities, which will be contained within the site boundaries.

Next Steps – Required by Order on Consent Amendment

On December 21, 2020, EPA and GE signed an Amendment to the Order on Consent for Removal Action, which requires GE to also remove elemental mercury from and eventually demolish Buildings A and B. EPA approved GE's design for this work in October 2020. The specifics of the work schedule are currently being developed, and GE contractors will conduct the work in a phased approach under close EPA oversight. Work in Building B began in March, and work in Building A is expected to start this summer. Contractors will remove bulk elemental mercury, which is mainly located within the layers of the flooring. Once the bulk mercury is removed, windows will be removed, and the building superstructures will be demolished. Any asbestos-containing materials will also be removed prior to demolition. The demolition of Buildings A and B is expected to be completed by early 2022. EPA and GE contractors will continuously monitor air for mercury vapors and dust during the work to protect the community. Air will be monitored on-site, along the site perimeter, and within the community. The community can expect sidewalk and partial road closures around the building on 5th Street and Bergen Street during major site work. In addition, there will be increased truck traffic in the area as needed for the removal of waste materials from the site for disposal.



Background

The Vo-Toys site is a former manufacturing facility that occupies a city block in Harrison, New Jersey. It is within a mixed residential and commercial neighborhood just north of Route 280. The Vo-Toys site includes three large, empty buildings that are contaminated with mercury from past industrial practices. Volatile organic chemicals (VOCs), including trichloroethene, have also impacted the soil, groundwater, and subsurface vapor at the Vo-Toys Site and at a related site located on the block to the east, known as the RCA site. The VOC contamination is being addressed by GE separately under state oversight.

Historically, the Vo-Toys buildings were used by the Edison Lamp Company and the Edison General Electric Company to manufacture incandescent lightbulbs from approximately 1902 to 1929. The facility was then operated by Radio Corporation of America (RCA) until 1976. From 1977 to 2015, Vo-Toys, Inc. stored toy products on-site. In 2015, a developer, BRG Harrison Lofts Urban Renewal, LLC (BRG), bought the site and had plans to redevelop the site into condominiums until the discovery of the mercury. The site is vacant, secured and, more recently, monitored through a fire watch service.