

EPA Emergency Response Site Update

Helena Mercury Release

Operations Period 03

June 3, 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.

High winds are expected during the next Operations Period (June 4). Response operations may be halted due to Health and Safety concerns.

[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 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 **to the extent practical**.
- 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 completed the removal of all items in the garage during this Operations Period. Many of the items in the garage were contaminated by the mercury release. The items were inspected and vacuumed with a vacuum designed to recover elemental mercury. Highly contaminated items were then treated with a chemical reagent designed to produce a non-vaporizing sulfide when it comes in contact with mercury. The retreat's staff identified several items that the non-profit will have difficulty replacing. The items include, but are not limited to, power tools, a riding mower and a charger for a golf cart. The response team will treat most of these items a second time with the chemical reagent and all are being set outside the garage

and allowed to vent. Any items that are screened at less than 6000 nanograms per cubic meter (ng/m³) are being set aside for eventual release to the property owner.

Most items removed from the garage were placed into two roll off dumpsters for testing and eventual disposal at an appropriate facility.

The response team is now beginning to demolish the work bench and shelves where the release occurred. Other benches, shelves, and drywall will also be demolished and properly disposed of as necessary. The mercury vacuum is and will continue to be used to collect elemental mercury throughout this process.

Removing last items from garage.



Hard to replace items that team is working to salvage.



Working hard to vacuum beads of mercury in cracks.

