

## EPA Emergency Response Site Update

Helena Mercury Release

Operations Period 06

June 6, 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 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.
- Clear the bathhouse for use (**complete**).
- Collect recoverable mercury.
- Clear the garage for use to the extent practical.
- Dispose of recoverable mercury.
- 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

A replacement mercury vacuum was delivered to Helena around midnight on June 5. The vacuum was secured from a team sub-contractor of EPA's Emergency and Rapid Response Contractor (ERRS) located in Billings, Montana. This vacuum was used to complete the demolition and removal of the work bench area and all the recoverable mercury discovered there. Plywood on the north wall was also removed. The entire garage was then carefully re-vacuumed inch-by-inch with the mercury vacuum.

The response team then applied a generous amount of chemical reagent designed to produce a non-vaporizing sulfide when in contact with residual mercury. This chemical reagent does not work well on beads of mercury so once the reagent had dried and the garage had been thoroughly ventilated, EPA's Superfund

Technical Assessment and Response Team (START) contractor entered the garage with sensitive instrumentation and carefully screened all the surfaces in the garage for mercury.

The response team continued to decontaminate several items that the non-profit would have difficulty replacing and requested that EPA salvage. Several power tools, the golf cart charger and other items were released to the property owner. Other items continue to be decontaminated.

*Completing demolition of release area, additional wall removed.*



*Completing detailed vacuum of garage, note demolished bench area.*



*Application of HgX to interior of garage.*

