

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
POLLUTION/SITUATION REPORT
Twin Falls Mercury - Removal Polrep
Initial Removal Polrep



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
Region X

Subject: POLREP #1
Initial POLREP
Twin Falls Mercury

Twin Falls, ID
Latitude: 42.5275632 Longitude: -114.4848996

To:
From: Richard Franklin, On-Scene Coordinator
Date: 9/18/2009
Reporting Period: 09/15/2009 to 09/18/2009

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Site Number:	Contract Number:
D.O. Number:	Action Memo Date:
Response Authority: CERCLA	Response Type: Emergency
Response Lead: EPA	Incident Category: Removal Assessment
NPL Status:	Operable Unit:
Mobilization Date: 9/16/2009	Start Date: 9/16/2009
Demob Date: 9/18/2009	Completion Date:
CERCLIS ID:	RCRIS ID:
ERNS No.:	State Notification:
FPN#:	Reimbursable Account #:

1.1.1 Incident Category

1.1.2 Site Description

On the morning of September 15, 2009, a flooring contractor on the way to install carpeting at an apartment complex in Twin Falls, Twin Falls County, Idaho, observed what appeared to be beads of free elemental mercury in the parking lot of the complex. The contractor immediately notified the Twin Falls Fire/Hazmat Department, who responded to the scene along with the state's Region 5 Hazardous Materials Regional Response Team (RRT5). The teams secured and isolated the scene. The state RRT and Twin Falls Hazmat Team were able to identify and remove a small amount (approximately 1 - 2 teaspoons) of the mercury in the parking lot, and isolated the remaining mercury which was found in cracks in the pavement. No source of the mercury could be found at this time, nor was the total volume of released mercury known. The Idaho State Police, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Idaho South Central Health District also responded to the incident. EPA was notified by the Idaho Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and DEQ through a DHS State Bridge Call in the afternoon, and was asked to mobilize to the site and provide air monitoring and technical assistance. The site is located at the southwestern edge of Twin Falls within a small residential area.

1.1.2.1 Location

1.1.2.2 Description of Threat

1.1.3 Preliminary Removal Assessment/Removal Site Inspection Results

2. Current Activities

2.1 Operations Section

2.1.1 Narrative

2.1.2 Response Actions to Date

On September 16, 2009, two EPA On-Scene Coordinators and EPA's START contractors mobilized to the site to coordinate with local and state agencies, and to begin air monitoring and assessment activities (one OSC later demobilized the site). Investigations and interviews with residents and children by the

agencies and the South Central Health District revealed that several children in the immediate area had been handling the mercury in the parking lot as far back as March 2009, and may have brought it into the apartment complex and nearby homes. District Health spoke with children (approximately 45) and educators at their elementary school and also developed and distributed mercury fact sheets to potentially affected children and families. The children also stated that the mercury seemed to appear and disappear a couple of times during the past year. At least seven children reported that they had played with the mercury, ridden their bicycles through it, and even scooped some up in a water bottle and taken it into one residential unit in the complex. It was reported that some children had spilled the mercury in the bedroom of one apartment unit.

EPA's Superfund Technical Assessment and Response Team (START) contractors, with assistance from the Twin Falls Fire Department and RRT5, conducted air monitoring with a Lumex instrument throughout the interior of each of the eight apartment units in the complex. EPA START also conducted a survey and air monitoring in the east and west adjacent open lots, and a nearby dumpster. In six of the apartment units, levels of mercury were measured to be at or near background levels (10 - 20 nanograms/cubic meter), and ranged from 10 - 20 ng/m³, to 80 ng/m³. In one unit, levels in a child's bedroom were up to 850 ng/m³. All of these levels are below the 1,000 ng/m³ health-based federal action levels for removal/clean up. In the unit where mercury was reportedly spilled, air monitoring results showed high levels of mercury vapors from 5,000 ng/m³ at floor level, to 1,500 ng/m³ in breathing space. In the adjacent lots, mercury readings showed background levels to only moderately above background levels. The dumpster showed slightly elevated levels of mercury at 300 ng/m³.

On September 17, the EPA START team continued air monitoring in four of five homes of children identified by the Health District who had played with the mercury. The fifth home was not tested due to refusal of the residents to allow EPA access. Due to concerns about the apartment where mercury had been reported to be spilled, EPA START sealed off the single bedroom, shut down ventilation to the apartment, and later re-entered the apartment and conducted air monitoring. Also, the school bus which transports local children to and from school was tested and inspected. Air monitoring results from the bus and each of the four homes showed only background levels of mercury. However, after re-entering the apartment, Lumex readings showed high levels of mercury up to 12,000 ng/m³. The residents of this unit were promptly notified and evacuated to a temporary residence (for three days) provided by the American Red Cross. Another community-based program will assist with housing for the residents after the three days are up. EPA START bagged up clothing, loose items, and mattresses from the apartment bedroom and removed them to a secure location.

In the afternoon, District Health and EPA interviewed the family of the fifth residence. During interviews, the agencies found that some of the children had, in fact, broken at least two thermometers in the apartment complex parking lot: once in July 2008 and again in February 2009. The thermometers were reported to be one small health thermometer, and a larger cooking thermometer.

In the afternoon, a meeting was held with the property owner and responding agencies, and the owner was fully apprised of the situation as well as her potential liabilities for assessment and clean up of the parking lot and apartment. She committed to hiring an appropriate hazardous materials clean up company immediately, and had contacted her insurance company to get assistance. The Idaho DEQ stated they will conduct oversight of the parking lot assessment and removal, and will work with District Health to make sure all residents are fully advised of the situation and potential health implications. For oversight of the apartment interior's assessment and removal, it was suggested that the Idaho state Health Department provide this help. This has not been confirmed at this time.

On September 18, EPA START conducted head-space air monitoring of the bagged up personal items, and cleared several of the bags for return to the family. Several other bags showed high readings of mercury: these were secured and will be disposed of by the removal contractor. During the day, meetings were held with DEQ and the property owner to provide technical assistance on correct assessment and removal actions, and to once again advise her of her responsibilities. The property owner hired H2O, a hazmat clean up contractor from Sparks, Nevada, who will mobilize to the site on September 19, 2009 to begin assessment and mitigation activities. Due to the investigation, interviews of school children, and air monitoring results of the apartments, houses, no contamination or spreading of mercury is anticipated at the school or other residences. EPA demobilized the site on September 18, 2009.

2.1.3 Enforcement Activities, Identity of Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs)

2.1.4 Progress Metrics

<i>Waste Stream</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Manifest #</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Disposal</i>

2.2 Planning Section

2.2.1 Anticipated Activities

2.2.1.1 Planned Response Activities

2.2.1.2 Next Steps

Under oversight of DEQ, the property owner's contractor (H20) will begin a thorough assessment and removal actions of the parking lot. The contractor will also conduct assessment, removal, and post-removal monitoring/sampling activities of the apartment in which mercury was spilled. Due to restrictions under DEQ jurisdiction, DEQ will not be able to provide oversight of the interior clean up actions. State Health will be requested by local authorities and District Health to provide oversight of the apartment removal. EPA will provide air monitoring data to District and State Health toxicologists for a full assessment of health risks to affected families. District Health will also conduct follow-up visits with affected families.

2.2.2 Issues

2.3 Logistics Section

No information available at this time.

2.4 Finance Section

No information available at this time.

2.5 Other Command Staff

No information available at this time.

3. Participating Entities

No information available at this time.

4. Personnel On Site

No information available at this time.

5. Definition of Terms

No information available at this time.

6. Additional sources of information

No information available at this time.

7. Situational Reference Materials

No information available at this time.