



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 2
290 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, NY 10007-1866

JUL 10 2000

Mr. Arnold P. Wendroff, Ph.D.
Mercury Poisoning Project
544 Eighth Street
Brooklyn, NY 11215-4201

Dear Mr. Wendroff:

Thank you for your letter of June 13, 2000, and bringing to our attention the likelihood of mercury spills of as much as 88 grams during improper pressure testing of gas piping by plumbing inspectors using a mercury manometer. We share your concerns that the toxic contamination resulting from such spills has the potential to affect the health and safety of the public.

This issue appears to be of a national concern, not just a regional problem. Therefore, we have referred this matter to EPA's Office of Pollution, Prevention, and Toxics (OPPT) in Washington D.C., with a recommendation that an advisory be sent to the trade unions and code enforcement officials involved. This recommendation requests that the advisory emphasize not only the harmful effects of mercury, but mitigation procedures that can be used to prevent and/or cleanup spills.

Since the reportable quantity for mercury is one pound, it is unlikely that EPA would learn of such spills through normal chemical emergency reporting mechanisms. The question to be determined is the extent of actual incidents of mercury spillage from improper testing. I am sure you realize that EPA resources are not sufficient to investigate all instances of gas piping testing for potential mercury spillage. EPA will discuss this matter with New York State Department of Environmental and Conservation and New York City Department of Environmental Protection officials and will respond to assess and cleanup mercury spillage from improper testing of gas piping when identified by local or state agencies.

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Should you have any further comments or questions concerning the advisory, please contact Greg Susanke, of OPPT, at (202) 260-3547.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard L. Caspe".

Richard L. Caspe, Director
Emergency & Remedial Response Division

cc: Greg Susanke, OPPT, 7404

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