

MERCURY

MANAGEMENT *news*

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Mercury Management EIS Will Identify Long-Term Solutions



On February 5, 2001, the Defense National Stockpile Center (DNSC) announced plans to prepare a Mercury Management Environmental Impact Statement (MM EIS) to evaluate alternatives for the long-term management of the DNSC mercury that is in excess of national defense requirements.

The February 5 *Federal Register* Notice of Intent explained the proposed action and alternatives for mercury management being considered, and listed the issues tentatively identified for analysis in the EIS. This included potential health effects; impacts

on water, air, plants, animals, soil, cultural resources; and socioeconomic effects on communities.

DNSC is responsible for the management of 65 commodities in the National Defense Stockpile, one of which is mercury. Most of the commodities in the stockpile have been declared excess to the United States defense needs and are being sold. However, due to concerns about mercury's impact on the global environment, DNSC stopped selling it in 1994. The mercury, totaling 4,408 metric tons, is in safe storage at four government locations: New Haven, Indiana; Oak Ridge, Tennessee; Somerville, New Jersey; and Warren, Ohio.

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Scoping Meetings Scheduled

The Defense National Stockpile Center (DNSC) plans to hold public meetings in April and May to provide opportunities for stakeholders to obtain information, submit comments, and talk one-on-one with DNSC staff and other government personnel about the preparation of the Mercury Management EIS. The public is invited to comment on the scope of the EIS through June 30, 2001.

- **Thursday, April 19, 2001**
Warren Depot—5:30–9:00 pm
McMenamy's Multipurpose Complex
325 Youngstown-Warren Road
Niles, Ohio
- **Tuesday, April 24, 2001**
New Haven Depot 5:30–9:00 pm
Park Hill Learning Center
1000 Prospect Avenue
New Haven, Indiana
- **Tuesday, May 1, 2001**
Washington, DC—1:30–5:00 pm
Marriott Metro Center
775 12th Street, NW
Washington, D.C.

- **Tuesday, May 8, 2001**
Oak Ridge Depot—5:30–9:00 pm
Garden Plaza Hotel
215 S. Illinois Avenue
Oak Ridge, Tennessee
- **Tuesday, May 22, 2001**
Somerville, NJ—5:30–9:00 pm
Hillsborough High School
Hillsborough Township,
New Jersey

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The MM EIS will help DNSC decide how to manage the material over the long term by identifying a range of reasonable alternatives and analyzing potential impacts of these alternatives on the natural and human environments. DNSC will consider the analytical results of the EIS, public input, technical studies, and other factors such as cost, policy considerations, agency mission, and government requirements.

“We are committed to selecting and implementing an environmentally safe and cost effective alternative that provides for maximum protection of the public health,” said Richard Connelly, DNSC Administrator.

Mercury management alternatives that will be considered include: (1) consolidating the mercury at one location for long-term storage; (2) stabilizing the mercury to reduce or eliminate toxicity and then storing or disposing of it; (3) selling it; or (4) leaving it where it is currently stored, with surveillance and corrective action as necessary. Other alternatives may be identified during the public scoping portion of the EIS process. Currently, there are no approved methods for disposal of mercury.

Background

The U.S. defense national stockpile was established after World War II to ensure that the United States would have access to commodities needed for defense and other critical uses in times of national emergency. Today, the United States defense needs and access to global markets have changed and, as a result, the mercury in the stockpile has been declared excess. Approximately 4,408 metric tons of mercury is stored in secure warehouses at DNSC depots in New Haven,

Indiana; Somerville, New Jersey; Warren, Ohio; and at the Department of Energy’s Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. In addition to mercury, the DNSC depots store other materials such as, chrome ore, lead, tin, copper, zinc, nickel, graphite, and rubber.

DNSC mercury has been safely stored for approximately 50 years in steel containers called flasks that are about the size of a three-liter soda bottle. The flasks are stored on wooden pallets with metal catch trays underneath to contain any possible leakage, and they are inspected regularly. Access to each depot is controlled by security guards and barbed-wire fencing.

Storage Locations**New Haven**

The New Haven (Casad) Depot stores 557 metric tons of mercury. The New Haven Depot consists of approximately 268 acres of land owned by the federal government. The entrance to the depot is located on the north side of Dawkins Road (State Route 14), approximately three miles east of New Haven, Indiana.

Warren

The Warren Depot stores 563 metric tons of mercury. The Warren Depot covers approximately 160 acres that the federal government has leased from the Pennsylvania Railroad Company (now the Conrail Railroad Company) since 1959.

Somerville

The Somerville Depot stores 2,615 metric tons of mercury. The Somerville Depot consists of approximately 77 acres of land owned by the federal government. The entrance to the depot is through Veterans Administration property on the western side of Route 206, approximately two and one half miles south of Somerville, New Jersey.

Oak Ridge

The Department of Energy’s (DOE’s) Y-12 National Security Complex (Y-12 Complex) stores 673 metric tons of DNSC mercury. The Y-12 Complex consists of approximately 811 acres of land owned by the federal government. It is located on DOE’s 34,516-acre Oak Ridge Reservation in eastern Tennessee. The complex is located approximately 25 miles west of Knoxville, Tennessee.

DNSC Looks for Alternative Storage Locations

As a part of the MM EIS assessment process, DNSC will evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives for storage of the excess mercury. One alternative is long-term consolidated storage of the 4,408 metric tons of mercury at an existing mercury storage location or at other storage locations.

A Notice of Request for Expressions of Interest was published in the Federal Register on March 5, 2001 as a first step to identifying alternative locations. In the notice DNSC asks other federal agencies to volunteer facilities for consideration.

Each submission will be evaluated for its unique characteristics to determine if it should be included as a reasonable alternative in the MM EIS, which will assess the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the various alternative management strategies. DNSC estimates that the storage period will begin in 2003 and continue for 40 years or more. Proposed storage location requirements can be found in the *Federal Register* Notice. Submissions from interested federal agencies are due by April 20, 2001.

Mercury Overview

Mercury (Hg) is a heavy, silver-white metal, sometimes called “quicksilver” that is liquid at room temperature. It is a naturally occurring element derived from the mercury ores cinnabar and calomel.

Mercury has been used for a variety of purposes since ancient times because of unusual properties that enable it to conduct electricity, measure temperature and pressure, act as a pesticide and fungicide, and alloy easily with other metals. It is used in consumer products such as fluorescent lights, electrical switches, hood and trunk lights in vehicles, thermostats, measuring devices, and as a component in dental fillings. Medical uses include blood pressure monitors, thermometers, x-rays, and medications. However, many products once made with mercury (such as batteries, paints, and pesticides) are increasingly made with alternative substances.

How Does It Get Into the Environment?

Mercury is released into the air, water and soil by a variety of natural processes and human activities. Mercury gas is released from rocks, soils, and surface waters. It evaporates easily into the atmosphere in vapor form and can be transported long distances. It returns to land or water surfaces through rain or snow and the cycle repeats. Mercury is discharged to the environment through human activities such as the burning of coal to produce electricity and the production of chlorine. In some countries, a process—illegal in the United States—that uses mercury to extract gold from ore results in mercury waste being released into the environment.

Many bottom-dwelling fish are exposed to mercury in sediments and in water from industrial pollutants. As other fish, birds, and ultimately humans consume

the fish, the mercury is transferred up the food chain. Mercury-contaminated fish are the source most likely to affect human health. High levels of exposure can effect the nervous system and cause health problems, especially in young children and fetuses. Health problems that may result include tremors, changes in vision or hearing, weakness, memory problems, headaches and nervousness.

The EIS Process Step-by-Step

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for major federal actions that could have significant impacts on the environment. The EIS must identify a range of reasonable alternatives for carrying out the proposed action including taking no action (maintaining the status quo), and it must consider potential consequences for natural and human environments.

“This process enables DNSC to fulfill its commitment to the safety of its employees, the surrounding communities, and the environment while ensuring continued environmentally safe management of the excess mercury,” explained Richard Connelly, DNSC Administrator.

➤ DNSC began the EIS process by publishing a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* on February 5, 2001 to let the public know that it is considering an action. The NOI describes the proposed action and provides background information on anticipated issues and potential impacts and identifies a preliminary list of alternatives to the proposed actions.

➤ The NOI initiated the formal scoping period. It is during this scoping period, which ends June 30, that the public can provide input that will help DNSC determine the alternatives, issues, and environmental impacts to be analyzed in the MM EIS. The scoping period includes information meetings in communities near current and proposed mercury storage sites and regional meetings, as appropriate. Meeting schedules and locations are listed in this newsletter, and were announced in a March 23 *Federal Register* Notice, in newspaper advertisements, on the MM EIS website, and other media.

➤ Preparation of the draft EIS is the next step in the NEPA process. The draft MM EIS will present, analyze, and compare the potential environmental impacts of reasonable alternatives for mercury management. It will also provide additional information on the methodologies and assumptions used in the analyses.

DNSC expects the draft MM EIS to be completed in late 2001 or early 2002. A Notice of Availability will be published and the draft EIS will be made available for public review and comment during a minimum 45-day comment period. DNSC will hold public meetings to receive comments on the draft EIS and comments will be considered in the preparation of the final EIS.

➤ After that, the final EIS, which will include any new technical data and studies, will be completed. Responses to all public comments will be included in this document.

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➤ After the final EIS is published, a minimum 30-day waiting period is required before a decision is made and recorded in a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD, which will be made available to the public, notifies the public of DNSC's decision and the reasons for that decision. No action can be taken until the decision has been made public and published in the Federal Register. The ROD is part of the decisionmaking process, which may also include consideration of other factors

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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such as cost, technical feasibility, agencies' statutory missions, and national objectives.

How To Submit Comments

Public comments are invited during the public scoping period, February 5–June 30, 2001. You can provide your comments to DNSC by several means:

- **Attend public meetings and provide comments in writing or verbally.** A court reporter will be available to record all verbal comments.
- **Visit the Mercury Management EIS Website at www.mercuryeis.com** to submit comments via electronic mail.
- **Record verbal comments** by calling the toll-free MM EIS Information Number at 1-888-306-6682.
- **Mail written comments to:** Attention: Project Manager, Mercury Management EIS, DNSC-E Defense Logistics Agency Defense National Stockpile Center 8725 John J. Kingman Road Suite 4616 Ft. Belvoir, VA 22060-6223
- **Fax written comments to:** 1-888-306-8818

- **Allen County Public Library**
435 Ann Street
New Haven, Indiana 46774-1279
- **Bridgewater Branch Library**
N. Bridge Street and Vogt Drive
Bridgewater, New Jersey 08807
- **Fairfax County Public Library**
12000 Government Center Parkway
Suite 324
Fairfax, VA 22035
- **Hillsborough Public Library**
379 South Branch Road
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
- **Martin Luther King, Jr. Library**
Paul Mills, Chief Sociology Education and
Government Division
901 G. Street, NW
Washington DC 20001
- **Oak Ridge Public Library**
1401 Oak Ridge Turnpike
Oak Ridge, TN 37830
- **Raritan Valley Community College**
Evelyn S. Field Library, North Branch
Route 28 and Lamington Road
Somerville, New Jersey 08876
- **Somerville Public Library**
35 West End Avenue
Somerville, New Jersey 08876
- **Warren-Trumbull County Public Library**
444 Mahoning Avenue NW
Warren, Ohio 44483
- **West End Branch Library**
1101 24th and L Street, NW
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