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# SUPERFUND COMMUNITY UPDATE

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## Port Refinery Site

Rye Brook, New York

September 3, 2004

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Community Involvement

Public participation is essential to the success of EPA's Superfund program. If you have any questions regarding cleanup activities at the site, please contact Dave Rosoff, On-Scene Coordinator, at **732-906-6879**, or Rich Cahill, Public Affairs Specialist at **212-637-3666** or **1-800-346-5009**.

#### Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)

A representative of ATSDR is available to answer your health-related questions. Please call Arthur Block, ATSDR Senior Regional Representative, at **(212) 637-4307**.

#### Superfund

For information on the Superfund process, please visit EPA's website at: **[www.epa.gov/superfund](http://www.epa.gov/superfund)**

The site contains information on the various tools and resources available to community groups, as well as fact sheets about other sites.

#### Regional Public Liaison

EPA Region 2 has designated a Regional Public Liaison for you to call, should you have concerns or complaints about the Superfund program. Please call **(888) 283-7626**.

To ensure the protection of area residents, on August 30, 2004, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) restricted access to a bicycle/walking path and surrounding areas behind Hillandale Road in Rye Brook, New York where mercury contamination has been discovered. The Agency is working with community representatives to inform local residents and the families of students who attend the Blind Brook High School. EPA will conduct future sampling to fully evaluate the nature and extent of the problem.

### Situation

On April 29, 2004, the Village of Rye Brook Police Department received a report of a mercury spill along a paved walkway on a portion of The Arbors property behind Hillandale Road in Rye Brook. The Westchester County Health Department and EPA were contacted and responded to the reported spill site. EPA cleaned up visible mercury found along the path and excavated about a ton of soil around the mercury spill. Sampling conducted May 6 and 7 within the excavated and adjacent areas revealed additional mercury contamination in soil along the path. EPA erected snow fencing around the contaminated area and placed signs warning people not to access it.

Followup soil sampling in the vicinity of the spill and on adjacent residential properties conducted in June and July has revealed that the mercury contamination is more widespread along the path (at least 200 feet of soil alongside the path is contaminated), than originally thought. In addition, sampling results indicate that mercury contamination has spread to areas south of the path following natural surface drainage pathways. As a result of this migration, sediment in a small pond on an adjacent residential property has been contaminated with elevated levels of mercury.

Because the area of known mercury contamination is larger than originally believed when the visible mercury was discovered along the path, EPA has completely restricted access to the path and the surrounding area. On August 31, the Agency erected a six foot chain link fence around all of the known contaminated areas. Access to Blind Brook High School from the path through The Arbors will not be possible at this time. The fence will remain in place while EPA continues to investigate the extent of the contamination. Once the full extent of the problem is understood, EPA will prepare and implement a cleanup plan to protect people's health and the environment.

## **Mercury**

Mercury is a naturally occurring element that is present throughout the environment. When liquid mercury is spilled, it forms droplets that can accumulate in the tiniest of spaces and then emit vapors into the air. Health problems caused by mercury depend on how much has entered your body, how it entered your body, how long you have been exposed to it, and how your body responds to the mercury. Prolonged exposure to elevated levels of mercury can have adverse impacts on the brain and the nervous system. As a result, all mercury spills, regardless of quantity, should be treated seriously. For more information on the health affects associated with exposure to mercury, contact: the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry at 212-637-4307.

## **Background**

In the early 1990's, the Rye Brook Police Department received complaints about a resident on Hillandale Road mishandling mercury. EPA was asked to investigate this residence and discovered extensive mercury contamination in a garage and cabana and in many areas on the property where the mercury had been illegally dumped. To remove the contamination, EPA demolished the resident's garage and cabana and excavated soils from the property and other surrounding areas where mercury had been deposited. EPA ultimately removed nearly 6,500 tons of soil contaminated with mercury from about a dozen properties. The cleanup, which cost about \$4 million, was completed in 1994. The Hillandale Road property, which was the source of the mercury contamination, is immediately adjacent to the present contamination on The Arbors property.

## **Future Activities**

The three rounds of sampling conducted by EPA this summer may not have identified all of the contaminated areas. EPA will be conducting additional, comprehensive sampling in September to determine the full extent of the mercury contamination. Once this assessment is completed and the full nature and extent of the problem is understood, EPA will take whatever actions are necessary to properly address the mercury contamination.