



More on Mercury Spill

Marty White

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Message from Dr. Chu



STEVEN CHU
DIRECTOR

May 8, 2008

To: Division Directors

From: Steven Chu 

Re: Safe Use of Equipment

As you may recall, we experienced a significant spill of mercury during installation of a new analytical instrument at the Molecular Foundry late last year. The instrument was purchased through UC Berkeley and was being installed by the vendor when the spill occurred. This incident prompted MSD to institute a rigorous process for screening and permitting all vendors and non-construction sub-contractors servicing the Foundry. We are piloting a similar process that will apply to the Lab as a whole to ensure that vendors and sub-contractors do work safely while here at LBNL.

However, the first line of defense in preventing similar incidents in the future is the staff member who is contemplating bringing equipment to LBNL, through whatever means. They must recognize the potential hazards (i.e. electrical, pressure, laser light, hazardous chemicals, etc.) that are presented by the equipment and ensure that these hazards are controlled during delivery, installation and operation. If they have any questions about the process, I want them to ask for help from their work lead, line manager, Division Safety Coordinator, or EHS.

The DOE expects us to control hazards related to equipment in our laboratories regardless of the pedigree of the equipment. I agree and expect you to communicate this to all your Division staff including students, guests and other visiting researchers.



What Happened?

- New equipment - Mercury porosity meter
 - Bought with UCB money
- Vendor removed a valve during installation and later tried to pressurize the system
- 2-4 kilograms of mercury spilled (4-9 pounds)
- Vendor & LBNL technician did not isolate the spill and tried to clean it up without help
- Technician found more mercury later that day and notified supervisor. EHS was called.



Consequences

- EHS found mercury in the room, hallway, elevator and stairwell in Molecular Foundry
- Technician's jeans were disposed of as hazardous waste
- EHS has developed a subcontractor safety screening process
 - Pilot plan
 - Applied to lab this summer



Staff Responsibilities

- Researcher must recognize if new equipment = new hazard
 - Procedures
 - Spill kit
 - Contact Supervisor, Safety Coordinator or EHS
- SWIMS
 - **S**top and think
 - **W**arn others
 - **I**solate the area
 - **M**onitor yourself carefully and completely
 - **S**tay in or near area until help arrives