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# NOS completes mercury spill cleanup

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Copy Editor

INDIAN HEAD — State officials have given the Naval Ordnance Station the go-ahead to refill an excavation site that was contaminated by a mercury spill in August.

About seven pounds—a half pint—of the poisonous, silvery metal spilled out of a ruptured sewer and contaminated about 20 tons of soil near the Process Control Laboratory.

The presence of the mercury in the sewer was discovered when a building contractor ruptured the line, sending hundreds of tiny globules of the metal into a nearby trench. The mercury, according to Mike Ward, NOS public information officer, had spilled into a sink in the laboratory and was trapped in the line for an unknown amount of time.

Excavation of the contaminated site began last October, and Ward said the Navy hauled away 150 55-gallon drums of soil to a disposal site in Ohio.

NOS finished its clean-up of the site in July, and last month a Maryland Office of Environmental Programs soil analysis determined the site was safe and ready for refilling.

Ward said refilling of the excavated site is "almost complete."

The spill was the first of its kind at NOS and was considered minor by both NOS and the state. It did not endanger any soil or water beyond the spill site.

Although a minor spill, clean-up was costly because of the nature of mercury. "When mercury shows up in its pure state, it can contaminate a lot of land," according to John Koontz of the state Waste Management Administration. "Industrial chemicals when put in the wrong place and then put in the right place... (it) becomes expensive."

The cost of the clean-up will be determined once the excavation site is refilled.

During the clean-up the contaminated area was roped off and covered with plywood and plastic. The lab drain was plugged, and the sewer line was rerouted away from the contaminated site.