

From: [Vong, Suong](#)
To: (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy
Cc: [Hoang, Anhthu](#); [Temple, Kurt](#); [Harrison, Brenda](#); [Stein, Jonathan](#)
Subject: NEW YORK CITY HAS VIOLATED THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF CARIBBEAN & LATINO COMMUNITIES EXPOSED TO MERCURY VAPOR IN THEIR HOMES
Date: Thursday, March 2, 2023 6:10:44 PM
Attachments: (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy; [NATURE 10 18 90.pdf](#)
[ZAYAS & OZUAH 1996 AJPH cond.pdf](#)
[JOHNSON POP & ENVT 1999.pdf](#)
[COHEN NYCDOH 01 00.pdf](#)
[NYCDOH Hg PROVIDERS 01 00.pdf](#)
[NYCDOH Hg ENGLISH 01 00.pdf](#)
[NYCDOH Hg SPANISH 01 00.pdf](#)
[NYCDOH Hg CREOLE 01 00.pdf](#)
[NYAS HARBOR MERCURY HISTOGRAM 05 02.pdf](#)
[LOPEZ NYC DEP 06 10 03.pdf](#)
[OZUAH ET AL AMBULATORY PEDS ART JAN FEB 03.pdf](#)
[NYC DEP CAC MINUTES APW COMMENTS 09 20 06.pdf](#)
[GILL ET AL SANTERIA PALO Hg 11 09.pdf](#)
[ALTMAN NYCC 11 01 00 re Manometer Hearing.pdf](#)
[ALTMAN NYCC BUILDINGS HEARING 02 15 01.pdf](#)
[NYAS HARBOR MERCURY HISTOGRAM 05 02.pdf](#)
[LOPEZ NYC DEP 06 10 03.pdf](#)
[OZUAH ET AL AMBULATORY PEDS ART JAN FEB 03.pdf](#)
[LINARES NYCC RESO 02 27 01.pdf](#)
[DINKINS NYC MAYOR 01 28 91.pdf](#)
[VASAN NYCDOHMH 09 28 22.pdf](#)
[BASSETT 12 16 15 & FARLEY LET 04 09 13.pdf](#)
[AVALTRONI NYC DEP 11 08 07.pdf](#)
[AVALTRONI NYC DEP 02 04 98.pdf](#)
[GREEN NYC PUB ADVOCATE Bennett 09 12 + 08 22 94 x 4.pdf](#)
[CLARKE NYCHA 09 25 02.pdf](#)
[PONCE NYCHA LET 08 30 10.pdf](#)
[EPA RARE GRANT PROPOSAL 2010.pdf](#)
[ORLAN MERCURY CONTAMINATION OF NYC SCHOOLS 11 02 07.doc](#)
[AZAM HANIF EMAIL 01 27 22 RE MAYOR'S EJ REPORT.docx](#)
[ATS DR TOX PROFILE 1999 EXCERPTS.docx](#)
[SPIGNER NYCC 11 01 00 LET.docx](#)
[NYCDEP CITIZENS ADVISORY MINUTES 09 20 06.pdf](#)
[ORLAN MERCURY CONTAMINATION OF NYC SCHOOLS 11 02 07.doc](#)
[FERNANDEZ NYC BD OF ED 01 30 91.pdf](#)
[OJITO RITUAL USE OF MERCURY NYT 1997.doc](#)
[WORTH NYT Manometer 10 08 00.pdf](#)
[GIULIANI 01 30 98.pdf](#)
[NJDEP 05 03 ART STERN et al.pdf](#)

Hello (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your correspondence. We will follow up shortly with a formal acknowledgment letter that will delineate EPA's next steps. Thank you.

Suong Vong
Team Lead, Office of External Civil Rights Compliance

Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Email: vong.suong@epa.gov
Phone: (202) 564-0392

From: (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy
Sent: Thursday, March 2, 2023 5:55 PM
To: Vong, Suong <Vong.Suong@epa.gov>; Temple, Kurt <Temple.Kurt@epa.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy

Subject: FW: NEW YORK CITY HAS VIOLATED THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF CARIBBEAN & LATINO COMMUNITIES EXPOSED TO MERCURY VAPOR IN THEIR HOMES

To: Suong Vong, MPA, Team Lead, **Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights Compliance, US EPA** (202) 564-0392

To: Kurt Temple, Senior Advisor, **Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights Compliance, US EPA** (202) 564-7299

Dear Ms. Vong and Mr. Temple,

Dr. Hoang’s autoreply directed me to you:

From: Hoang, Anhthu Hoang.Anhthu@epa.gov
Sent: Thursday, **March 2, 2023** 5:17 PM
(b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy

NEW YORK CITY HAS VIOLATED THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF CARIBBEAN & LATINO COMMUNITIES EXPOSED TO MERCURY VAPOR IN THEIR HOMES

I am out of the office from Monday 02/27/2023 through Friday 03/03/2023. I will respond to your message when I return. If you need immediate assistance, please contact Suong Vong (vong.suong@epa.gov) or Kurt Temple (temple.kurt@epa.gov).

Thank you.

and so I’m forwarding this missive to you. I see from a September 8, 2022 news story <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/can-the-epa-get-environmental-justice-right/> that my issue was well described by Mr. Temple when he stated that:

... the EPA plans to tell states how the agency expects them to investigate environmental discrimination claims and what they must consider, **including potentially cumulative pollution impacts,** before issuing a new permit. **“Obviously, this is a really hot topic,”** he said.

This is a **“REALLY HOT TOPIC,”** which is why EPA has been kicking it down the road for the past **33 years.**

Sincerely yours,

(b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy

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From: **(b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy**

Sent: Thursday, **March 2, 2023** 5:11 PM

To: Hoang.Anhthu@epa.gov; tejada.matthew@epa.gov; EngelmanLado.Marianne@epa.gov;
Dorka.Lilian@epa.gov

Cc: (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy

Subject: NEW YORK CITY HAS VIOLATED THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF CARIBBEAN & LATINO COMMUNITIES EXPOSED TO MERCURY VAPOR IN THEIR HOMES

To: Anthu Hoang, JD, PhD, Acting Deputy Director, External Civil Rights Compliance, **Office of General Counsel, US EPA** (212) 637-5033

To: Matthew Tejada, PhD, MPhil, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Environmental Justice, **Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights, US EPA**
(202) 564-2515

To: Marianne Engelman-Lado, JD, MA, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, " " " "
(202) 564-0012

To: Lilian Sotolongo Dorka, JD, Deputy Assistant Administrator for External Civil Rights " " " " "
(202) 564-9649

From: (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy
(b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy Google Scholar Key Words < mercury
Santeria > < mercury (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy

Dear Drs. Hoang, Tejada, and Mss. Engelman-Lado, Dorka,

I accuse the City of New York, of violating the civil rights of mostly minority communities, some of whose homes are certain to be grossly contaminated with mercury ritualistically sprinkled on their floors, and hence exposing all occupants to continuous inhalation exposure of mercury vapor. As much, if not most of these exposures are at second-hand, the larger community is exposed as well, and not merely the initial users/sprinklers of the mercury.

The initial publication of the sales and presumptive ritualistic use of elemental mercury here in New York City was in my attached October 18, 1990 letter to *Nature*, which stated that:

Of 28 botanicas visited in New York City, 13 prescribed that mercury be sprinkled on the floor or mixed with soap and water used to mop the floor, to rid the house of evil influences or for other purposes. Some botanicas suggested repeated applications at intervals

of three days to a week, until the desired result is attained. ... Any of these procedures would liberate mercury vapor directly into the room's atmosphere.

Prior to publication, I had telephoned several members of the New York City Department of Health (DOH), which resulted in my initial meeting with DOH personnel at their headquarters on September 20, 1990. A follow-up meeting with the initial four health professionals, and an additional three attorneys was held on September 25, 1990. This documents the New York City Department of Health's initial awareness of these ongoing exposures to mercury vapor in Caribbean and Latino homes where mercury has been ritualistically sprinkled on floors.

The several New York City agencies that have been aware of the dangers to public health due to the magico-religious uses of elemental mercury in NYCs' Caribbean and Latino communities, as documented in the enclosed excerpts and narratives, and the associated attached documents include:

Department of Health / and Mental Hygiene

Office of the Mayor

Board / Department of Education

Public Advocate

Department of Environmental Protection

City Council, City of New York

New York City Housing Authority

New York City government agencies have long been aware of the provisions of its Legal Code regarding Public Nuisances as described in <https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/newyorkcity/latest/NYCAadmin/0-0-0-4367>

§ 7-703 Public nuisance defined.

The following are declared to be public nuisances: ...

(e) Any building, erection or place, other than a one- or two-family dwelling classified in occupancy group J-3 pursuant to section [27-237](#) of this code, which is a nuisance as defined in section [17-142](#) of this code or which is an infected and **uninhabitable house** as defined in section [17-159](#) of this code or which is in violation of subdivision two of section [16-118](#) of this code;

https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/newyorkcity/latest/NYCAadmin/0-0-0-27524#JD_17-142

§ 17-142 Definition of nuisance.

The word "nuisance", shall be held to embrace public nuisance, as known at common law or in equity jurisprudence; **whatever is dangerous to human life or detrimental to health**; whatever building or erection,

or part or cellar thereof, is overcrowded with occupants, or is not provided with adequate ingress and egress to and from the same or the apartments thereof, or is not sufficiently supported, ventilated, sewered,

drained, cleaned or lighted in reference to its intended or actual use; and **whatever renders the air or human food or drink, unwholesome. All such nuisances are hereby declared illegal.**

There can be no doubt that the sprinkling of elemental mercury on the floors of homes, especially rental homes, immediately creates a public nuisance. New York City has long been aware of the creation of such mercury polluted housing, both private and public. Yet despite such knowledge/awareness, New York City agencies, including all of the aforementioned, have refused to *substantively* assess the geospatial extent of the contamination, and the levels of mercury vapor inside representative samples within mercury-user communities. Nor has New York City *substantively* informed the clinical communities of the extent of these exposures, in order that their clinical suspicion and diagnostic abilities be enabled to detect and treat the latent epidemic of chronic mercury poisoning that must exist, given the magnitude of ritualistic mercury use; perhaps best documented in the attached letter: ZAYAS & OZUAH 1996 AJPH COND.pdf; and: NYAS HARBOR MERCURY HISTOGRAM 05 02.pdf.

Based on the documentation that I've submitted, which is but a small fraction of my 33 years of correspondence with New York City agencies, I contend that New York City is guilty of a variety of **Civil Rights Violations**, and I request that EPA's **Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights**, and EPA's **Office of General Counsel**, investigate my allegations and act to ensure that these Caribbean and Latino communities are protected from their ongoing domestic exposure to mercury vapor arising from its cultural / magico-religious / ritualistic use.

I have additionally apprised New York City of two other neglected sources of the mercury contamination of housing and buildings in general, from plumber's mercury manometer spills; as well as of historic mercury spills in school (public and private) science teaching facilities. These ongoing exposures, and New York City's indifference to assessing and abating them, are described in several of the enclosed and attached citations and documents.

Based on the documentation that I've submitted, which is but a small fraction of my 33 years of correspondence with New York City agencies, I contend that **New York**

City is guilty of a variety of Civil Rights Violations, and I request that EPA's **Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights,** and EPA's **Office of General Counsel,** investigate my allegations, and *act* to ensure that these Caribbean and Latino communities are protected from their ongoing domestic exposure to mercury vapor arising from its **cultural / magico-religious / ritualistic use,** and the general public is protected from the mercury **contamination of schools,** and from mercury from unreported **plumber's manometer spills.**

Sincerely yours,

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(b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy *Nature* October 18, **1990.** "Domestic mercury pollution" ["Of 41 samples purchased [in NYC] the median amount was 8.5g, with a mean of 9.0g, a range of 1.5 to 31.3g and a modal cost of \$1.00.

Of 28 botanicas visited in New York City, 13 prescribed that mercury be sprinkled on floors ..."] We demonstrated that mercury is sold in appreciable unit amounts by a sizeable fraction of botanicas, and that the recommended uses and recommended amounts of mercury would certainly result in the gross and persistent contamination of the homes in which it was used.]

Dinkins, Office of the Mayor, City of New York. January 28, **1991.** Letter. Cc'd to Woodrow A. Myers, JR. MD Commissioner of Health ["Thank you for bringing to my attention your research and concerns about the sale of elemental mercury in botanicas and its potential use among people who practice Yoruba-based religions." The Mayor was aware of the practice and communicated them to Dr. Myers, the Commissioner of Health.]

Fernandez, Chancellor, Board of Education, City of New York. January 30, **1991.** Letter. ["I wish to thank you for alerting us to the possible health risks to the children from mercury vapor exposure. We're especially concerned about this potential health threat because of the occult practices which you have described involving certain Afro-Caribbean/Latin American religions. As a result of your letter, we have contacted the

Department of Health requesting their advice as to the need for an educational campaign at the present time.” Note that the Department Of Health officially apprised of these domestic mercury exposures by the Board of Education.]

Green, Public Advocate for the City of New York. August 22, 1994. Letter Margaret Hamburg, Commissioner, New York City Department of Health [“It has come to my attention that retail stores in many parts of the City sell elemental mercury in containers that are not labelled so as to warn consumers of the potential hazards that its use presents.” Both the Public advocate and the DOH Commissioner were aware of the “potential hazards’ posed by magico-religious mercury use.]

Zayas & Ozuah *American Journal of Public Health* January, 1996. “Mercury Use in *Espiritismo: A Survey of Botanicas*” [“Our survey shows that mercury is quite easy to purchase, and the manner of use may create situations of constant exposure to potentially high levels of mercury vapors in the immediate atmo[1]sphere. Of course, more research is needed. In particular, explorations of mercury levels in inner-city communities should include adherents of spiritualism as well as nonadherents since the latter may be exposed unwittingly to mercury poisoning by residing in apartments and homes previously inhabited by mercury[1]sprinkling tenants.” It is certain that the DOH was aware of these findings and their implications for public health.]

Ojito, *The New York Times*, December 14, 1997. “Ritual Use of Mercury Prompts Testing of Children for Illness” [“Fred Winters, a spokesman for the city's Department of Health, said no cases of mercury poisoning from the religious use or the sale of mercury in botanicas have been reported to the department. Yet, based on the numbers obtained in the 1995 Montefiore study of 41 botanicas, [REDACTED] has calculated that as many as 13,800 homes in New York could be contaminated every year, which he said means more than 27,000 people could be exposed to mercury vapors annually.”]

Giuliani, Mayor, New York City. January 30, 1998 WABC Talk-In Radio Show with Mayor Rudolph Giuliani (800) 848-9222 10:33am [REDACTED] “Okay, so it’s hardly something that has been kept under wraps, and yet the City has abjectly failed to enforce its own regulations. RG “And the Health Department, you’re saying, and the Federal Agencies don’t want to address [REDACTED] They don’t want to address it. They’re

afraid.”]

Avaltroni, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, February 4, **1998**. Letter Re: “We have consulted with the New York City Department of Health on the issue of mercury exposure due to ritual practices.”

[“We have consulted with the New York City Department of Health on the issue of mercury exposure due to ritual practices. The Department of Health is currently working on an outreach program to inform the potentially affected communities of the dangers associated with exposure to mercury “]

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), March **1999**. Toxicological Profile for Mercury [“There is an urgent need to obtain information on the levels of exposure from these practices to determine if children or adults are at risk. Mercury vapor concentrations may be much higher after use during the winter months when the heat is turned on and the windows are closed, so data that reflect a variety of possible exposure scenarios are also needed.” In 1999, the CDC’s ATSDR stated the “urgent need” to assess environmental mercury vapor exposures inside dwellings. However, 24 years later, New York City has failed to make this assessment.]

Johnson, *Population and Environment* May, **1999**. “Elemental Mercury Use in Religious and Ethnic Practices in Latin American and Caribbean Communities in New York City” [“A survey was conducted to determine the use pattern of elemental mercury in the Latin American and Caribbean communities in New York City. Two hundred and three adults participated in the survey. Fourth-four percent of the respondents from the Caribbean and 27% from Latin America stated that they have knowledge of such cultural uses.”]

Cohen, New York City Department of Health, January, **2000**. Letter “Dear Colleagues” [“It has been reported that in some Latin American and Caribbean communities in the city, metallic mercury available in botanicas and religious stores is used in religious or ethnomedical practices in a manner that may adversely affect health.”]

New York City Department of Health, January, **2000**. Metallic Mercury Exposure: A Guide for Health-Care Providers [“Some people in Latin American and Caribbean communities, especially those who practice Santeria, Espiritismo, or Voodoo, may use metallic mercury (known as azogue

or vidajan) in religious and ethnomedical rituals that could adversely affect their health.”]

New York City Department of Health, January, 2000. Azogue Vidajan Metallic Mercury Poisoning [“Health Effects on Children *Azogue/Vidajan* is most dangerous to the unborn child and small children Vapors breathed in by pregnant women can enter the developing baby. *Azogue/Vidajan* can also be passed on to an infant through the mother’s breast milk”]

New York City Department of Health, January, 2000. Metallic Mercury Azogue Evenenamiento [Spanish translation of above English version.]

New York City Department of Health, January, 2000. Metallic Mercury Vidajan Pwazon [Haitian Creole of above English version. All of these brochures were initially placed on the NYCDOH web site.

All were soon removed and never updated or replaced. The printed brochures had a very limited press run, and were never disseminated in any meaningful way, either to health care providers, or to the lay public in the targeted Caribbean and Latin American communities.]

Worth, The New York Times, October 8, 2000. “A Little-Known Threat” [“It is difficult to tell how many spills have been caused by mercury gauges ... “]

Altman, New York City Council, November 1, 2000. Letter. Re: a hearing on “... banning the testing of gas piping systems with gauges that use mercury.” [“Oversight: The Use, Hazards and Clean-up of mercury used for Testing and Metering Gas.”]

(b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Ent. Pr Mercury Poisoning Project. November 1, 2000. Letter to Archie Spigner, Chairman, New York City Council, Committee on Housing and Buildings. [“The copy of the draft amendment in my possession correctly states that when mercury is used in gauges it has been known to escape the gauge and cause contamination of the surrounding area. *Mercury that has spilled and not been appropriately cleaned up can have devastating effects on the inhabitants of buildings.*” ... “Therefore, if this Committee is truly concerned about the *devastating effects* of manometer mercury spills, it must also address the problem of detecting and remediating past mercury spills. This will be a far more costly and complex undertaking than merely legislating for alternative pressure measurement instruments.”]

Altman, New York City Council. February 15, 2001. Letter. Re: “... banning the testing

of gas piping systems with gauges that use mercury.” [“Resolution ... in relation to banning the testing of gas piping systems with gauges that use mercury ...” The City Council refused to investigate the many buildings where mercury manometers had spilled their contents, and never reported or remediated.]

Linares, New York City Council. February 27, **2001**. Resolution No. 1773 “... to hold a public hearing on the impact of residential use of elemental mercury on the health and safety of the residents of the City of New York.”

[“The general public may be unknowingly exposed to mercury vapor by means of second hand exposure; for example, when a tenant scatters mercury on the floor and later vacates the apartment only to leave the mercury trapped in cracks in the floor or in the carpet, where it can later evaporate into poisonous mercury vapor.”]

De Cerreno, et al., New York Academy of Sciences (NYAS), May, **2002**. Pollution Prevention and Management Practices for Mercury in the New York/New Jersey Harbor

[“Although religious and cultural uses of mercury are discussed at various points throughout the document, no recommendations for this potential source are being made at this time. Although there are a few studies that point to the individual hazards of such practices, the extent of such practices and how much of the mercury utilized actually makes its way into the Harbor are unclear. Furthermore, for the figures that do exist, there are very large error bars associated with them. Thus, it is felt that sufficient evidence is lacking to make a recommendation that singles out a particular ethnic or cultural group.” The NYAS estimated that between 200 to 600 kilograms per year was entering the Harbor. This is a tiny fraction of what is sprinkled on floors of homes.]

Clarke, New York City Housing Authority, September 25, **2002**. Letter. Re: possible health risks to residents of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) caused by the ritualistic use of mercury.” [“The DOH is

familiar with your work but recommended that NYCHA should await the findings of the CDC and other concurrent studies, i.e., New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, rather than perform our own independent study.” The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection found significant numbers of homes in heavily Caribbean Union City and West New York contaminated with problematic levels of mercury vapor. The DOH and NYCHA were well aware of the NJDEP’s findings, yet refused to conduct similar investigations of mercury

vapor levels in NYCHA housing.]

Stern et al. New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, May **2003**. Cultural Uses of Mercury in New Jersey [“It seems clear that there are significantly elevated indoor mercury concentrations in at least some of the buildings surveyed in Hudson County in areas anecdotally associated with cultural mercury use.” Yet NYCHA refused to use these findings as a basis to implement their own assessment of mercury vapor levels in NYCHA developments.]

Lopez, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, June, **2003**. Letter. “Re: Mercury Trackdown Sampling” [“The source(s) of about 3 ounces per day of mercury entering the Wards Island plant was not identified. This plant serves the upper east side of Manhattan and the westernmost-third of the Bronx.” It was no coincidence that these two communities were heavily Dominican and Puerto Rican, with many botanicas, and likely many ritualistic mercury users.]

Ozuah et al., *Ambulatory Pediatrics*. January-February, **2003**. “Mercury Exposure in an Urban Pediatric Population” [We found that 5% of subjects had unsuspected elevated urinary Hg levels. This finding, in a group of inner-city minority children, strongly supports the need for further investigation of the sources of mercury exposure in this population.” However, to date, New York City has made no effort to ascertain that source.]

New York City Department of Environmental Protection, September 20, **2006**. Minutes: Citizens Advisory Committee-Pollution Prevention [“(b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Ent. Privacy” said mercury for ritualistic use is sold to and purchased from Botanicas ... (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Ent. Privacy criticized officials for not taking this issue seriously. Letters have been sent to government officials/politicians urging action.”]

(b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Ent. Privacy Mercury Poisoning Project. November 2, **2007**. Letter to Bernard Orlan, Director, Environmental Health and Safety, New York City Department of Education [“I therefore urge the Department of Education to immediately confer with the NYC Department of Health, the N.Y.C. Department of Environmental Protection, and the U.S. Occupational Health and Safety Administration, to formulate and execute a program to measure mercury vapor levels in every middle and high school science classroom, laboratory, and science preparation room, and in those older elementary schools where the upper grade science teachers

have used mercury.” This was never done, and most older junior/intermediate and senior high school science facilities are likely contaminated from ‘historic’ mercury spills.]

Avaltroni, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, November 8, **2007**. Letter. Re: “concerning the mercury vapor that can be found in New York City schools. [“. I understand the importance of preventing the spillage of mercury and the harmful effects that exposure to this substance can cause, but I am confident that the DOE will take every precaution to safeguard the students, teachers and other staff to this substance.” However to date, the DOE has made no attempt at assessing the levels of mercury contamination in its older schools.]

Gill¹ et al., *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. November, **2009**. “Santeria and Palo Mayombe: Skulls, Mercury, and Artifacts” [“Santeria practices include animal and artifact offerings, dance, sung invocations, and use of elemental mercury (5-7).”

Mercury poisoning due to these customs is a concern among public health practitioners (5,6,8). ¹New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner]

Enck, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 2. July 13, **2010**. Letter. Re: “EPA has an ongoing concern about potential mercury (Hg) exposure ... EPA has explored accessing vacant NYC Housing Authority apartments ...” [“Despite knowledge of the existence of ritualistic practices involving mercury, no data exist on levels of in-dwelling exposure. A study conducted previously by NJDEP relied on indirect indicators outside apartments of conditions inside apartments and could not provide an estimate of the airborne concentration of mercury inside the apartments. Measurement of mercury vapor inside a dwelling, at the point of exposure, is the best environmental indicator of potential hazard. This pilot level study of targeted housing will inform the potential extent and magnitude of mercury vapor contamination secondary to ritualistic practices by directly measuring mercury vapor concentration in targeted housing units.” But the study was never conducted, as NYCHA refused to engage, and the EPA decided not to fund this research.]

Ponce, New York City Housing Authority, August 30, **2010**. Letter. Re: “... studies indicated that there is neither widespread nor significant exposure from ritualistic mercury use ...” [“... we do not feel it necessary to conduct a separate NYCHA study.” Indoor air studies of mercury vapor levels inside dwelling units have never been made, and EPA’s proposed study would have been at no cost to NYCHA.]

Farley, New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. April 9, **2013**. Letter. Re: "... regarding exposure to mercury in New York City communities. The Department has conducted a number of educational, investigative and regulatory actions to effectively address such concerns. ["Based on the evidence available to us, we do not currently believe that additional studies are warranted."]

Bassett, New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene December 16, **2015**. Letter. Re: "We ... reiterate that the Department has taken necessary and prudent steps to evaluate and act on sources of mercury exposure. ["After careful review of the materials and further discussions with senior scientists, we stand by our assertions indicated in the letter sent to you by former Commissioner Thomas Farley, MD, MPH, in 2013."]

Azam, New York City Council, District 39. January 27, **2022**. Email. ["Thank you for sharing with me your concerns regarding this public health crisis caused by mercury poisoning that hurts so many communities. I am sorry to hear that the Mayor's office rejected the report. Council Member Hanif is aware of the issue and will be writing a letter to the Mayor's Office to reconsider their actions taken on the New York City's Environmental Justice for All Report Scope of Work Environmental Justice Interagency Working Group December 2021. I will follow up when I know more."]

Vasan, New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. September 28, **2022**. Letter. Re: "... we believe our agency has taken necessary steps to evaluate and act of sources of mercury exposure." ["After reviewing our work conducted in response and from discussions with our senior scientists, we believe our agency has taken necessary steps to evaluate and act of sources of mercury exposure. We appreciate your concern for the health of fellow New Yorkers."]

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