



Inland Coalition for
Immigrant Justice



**FREEDOM
FOR IMMIGRANTS**

TOGETHER WE WILL END IMMIGRATION DETENTION

May 21, 2020

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RE: Toxic Exposure of People in ICE Detention at Adelanto to Hazardous Chemicals

Dear Field Office Director Marin, Assistant Field Office Director Valdez, Warden Janecka, and Officer for Civil Rights & Civil Liberties Quinn:

We write to voice our concern about the ongoing and highly toxic chemical exposure suffered by people in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) detention at Adelanto Detention Facility (“Adelanto”) in Adelanto, CA.

Since May 11, 2020, we have received reports multiple times per day from people in ICE detention at Adelanto regarding the negative and serious health consequences that they are suffering due to being exposed to hazardous chemicals being disseminated by the GEO Group staff. These are just a few of these first-person reports:

1. “The disinfection spray that the facility is using is hurting us. Everyone in our facility has been having bloody noses, burning eyes, headaches and our bones have been hurting. The spray that they use is called HDQ Neutral. On the bottle it says that it has ‘Irreversible eye damage and skin burns. Avoid breathing. Do not get in eyes or on

skin. Wear goggles and face shields. Wash thoroughly after using.’ The facility is not protecting us from this spray. Our beds are right next to the door handles so when they spray it on the door handles it gets into our rooms and we breath the spray in. We have asked to be seen by the doctor but they have not stopped using the spray.”

2. "I started bleeding from my nose after being in contact with a strong chemical they are using. I am still bleeding, more than five hours later. An official had entered the bathrooms in the morning and sprayed a very strong disinfectant. The spray is called HDQ Neutral. I was told about the spray's name by an employee. When I complained to [supervisory staff], she told me that it is not her problem, but that of the cleaning and safety staff and to take it up with them. The staff had placed advisories on the walls, but it did not mention any safety risks or to wait a period of time before using the bathrooms."
3. "The guards have started spraying this chemical everywhere, all over everything, all the time. It causes a terrible reaction on our skin. When we ask for medical assistance, they just give us some cream to put over it. The spray also hurts our airways. When I blow my nose, blood comes out. They are treating us like animals. One person fainted and was taken out, I don't know what happened to them. There is no fresh air."
4. "Many of us are very allergic to the substance that they have been spraying. It causes rashes and there is one man with blisters. The bottles say "HDQ." They spray it on the phones, chairs, tables, every 15-20 minutes - all day & all night long. They are keeping track on some sort of document to make sure they are continuously spraying. There is no fresh air to breathe in the room. The guards have masks & gloves so don't seem bothered by it but many of us have very red eyes, sore throats, and headaches."
5. "The toxic spray they are using is making everyone inside very sick. It's causing allergies and a lot of detainees are sneezing and coughing up blood."
6. "The toxic spray they are using every 30min is causing really bad allergies. Symptoms are red irritated eyes, coughing up blood, sneezing and nausea. The spray is also contaminating the food."

From these multiple reports, we can confirm the following:

- The GEO Group guards are rampantly spraying chemicals, such as Spartan Chemical Company’s HDQ Neutral, every 15-30 minutes around the housing units. The sprayed chemicals are coming into contact with individuals’ eyes, noses, mouths, skin, clothing, bedding, food and drinking water, on an ongoing basis.
- At least nine individuals housed in units across the facility have reported the following symptoms as widespread among the population of detained people inside

Adelanto, as direct results of the hazardous chemicals being sprayed on them on an ongoing basis:

- Painful, burning, red, and swollen eyes, nose, and throat.
 - Painful, red, and blistering skin; rashes.
 - Painful breathing, sneezing and coughing.
 - Nosebleeds.
 - Sneezes and coughs that produce blood.
 - Severe nausea.
 - Stomach pain.
 - Headache.
 - Fainting.
- The GEO Group staff have not verbally shared or posted any safety risks or precautions regarding the chemicals they are spraying with the individuals in detention.
 - There is no ventilation to mitigate the negative effects of these chemicals; the resulting sensation has been described by multiple individuals as “not being able to breathe.”
 - The GEO Group staff has not addressed the medical needs of people who have been exposed to the chemicals.

We are especially concerned that the misuse of and purposeful exposure to such harsh chemicals is retaliatory. In late April, we received and made public reports from people in detention in Adelanto that they were cleaning the facility “just with water” or shampoo and were not provided appropriate cleaning supplies to sanitize the facility.

On April 10, 2020, ICE issued a statement¹ asserting that it would follow guidance issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding the usage of disinfectant products to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in detention facilities. However, it is apparent that ICE has not been following EPA guidance, which clearly state the following:

- “These products are for use on surfaces, NOT humans.”²
- “Use products that could reduce your inhalation exposure, such as wipes or dampened towels, to disinfect surfaces. These options will substantially lower inhalation exposure compared to sprays, which generate aerosols.”³
- “EPA does not recommend use of fumigation or wide-area spraying to control COVID-19... Fumigation and wide-area spraying are not appropriate.”⁴

¹ <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/coronavirus/eroCOVID19responseReqsCleanFacilities.pdf>

² <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

³

<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/how-can-members-my-household-use-disinfectants-properly-control-covid-19-if-family>

⁴ <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/can-i-use-fumigation-or-wide-area-spraying-help-control-covid-19>

- “Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products for concentration, application method and contact time.”⁵

In regards to this last point, the Safety Data Sheet for Spartan Chemical Company’s HDQ Neutral⁶ clearly states the following guidelines for safe application, which ICE and the GEO Group are blatantly violating:

- “Use only outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.”
- “Do not breathe mist, vapors or spray.”
- “Wear protective [e.g., rubber or other chemical-resistant] gloves. Wear eye / face protection [e.g., splash goggles]. Wear protective clothing.”
- “IF ON EYES: IMMEDIATELY CALL A POISON CENTER OR PHYSICIAN.”
- “IF ON SKIN: IMMEDIATELY CALL A POISON CENTER OR PHYSICIAN.”
- “IF INHALED: IMMEDIATELY CALL A POISON CENTER OR PHYSICIAN.”
- “IF SWALLOWED: IMMEDIATELY CALL A POISON CENTER OR PHYSICIAN.”
- “Eye contact may cause permanent damage.”

In light of the increasing numbers of people in detention testing positive for COVID-19, we are concerned that ICE and the GEO Group’s response fails to prevent the spread of COVID-19 causing serious and potentially irreversible harm to the health of those in custody. Furthermore we urge ICE to use its discretion to order the immediate release of all immigrants detained in Adelanto, starting with those most vulnerable, to their families and communities where they can have safe housing.

Sincerely,



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Lizbeth Abeln
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https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-04/documents/316485-c_reopeningamerica_guidance_4.19_6pm.pdf

⁶ <https://www.spartanchemical.com/sds/downloads/AGHS/EN/1202.pdf>

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