

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 15, 2020

Acting Director Matthew T. Albence
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security
500 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20536

Dear Acting Director Albence:

Troubling reports have surfaced in light of an official complaint raised by Freedom for Immigrants and the Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice alleging the improper use of a toxic disinfectant spray – known as HDQ Neutral – to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 at the Adelanto Detention Facility.

The manufacturer of HDQ Neutral, the Spartan Chemical Company, issues strict warnings about the chemical's use indoors and potential dangers if vapors are inhaled or if the chemical comes in contact with an individual's eyes or skin. Several detainees at the Adelanto facility appear to be showing an array of adverse effects directly linked to exposure to HDQ Neutral, such as nose bleeds, fainting, headaches, bleeding, eye damage, and skin rashes. Beyond reports of the misuse of this chemical, the complaint also indicated that when detainees have sought medical attention for these symptoms, they have only been given a topical cream as treatment.

At least 9 individuals have fallen severely ill in the wake of this spray being used. This number can be reasonably expected to grow with the unabated use of HDQ Neutral at Adelanto. Furthermore, multiple accounts from the complaint indicate that guards have been continuously spraying HDQ Neutral as many as 20 times per day.

The apparent disregard for safety precautions around the use of HDQ Neutral is deeply troubling. Concerns about the mismanagement of facilities and poor treatment of detainees at Adelanto and other ICE detention facilities across the country are not new. This report comes on the heels of initial complaints that proper precautions were not taken to ensure the safety of detainees at Adelanto in the wake of COVID-19. Adelanto appears to have responded in an unhealthy and extreme manner, going from reportedly cleaning surfaces with only water to the drastic action of repeatedly using toxic chemicals throughout the day without adhering to the necessary safety precautions instructed even by the manufacturer of these chemicals.

While efforts must be made in order to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus, it is imperative the chemicals used are both safe and effective. At a minimum, the GEO Group and DHS should adhere to some level of precautions when using toxic chemicals in confined spaces when detainees are exposed. Global pandemic or not, the mitigation of COVID-19 spread must be done in a safe and responsible way, particularly when human lives are at risk.

We respectfully request the answers to the following questions:

1. How long has the disinfectant spray HDQ Neutral been in use at the Adelanto Detention Facility? How often is the spray being used daily?
2. Are there other disinfectants being used at the Adelanto Detention Facility?
3. What precautionary measures are being taken and what personal protective equipment or materials are being issued to detainees for the purpose of limiting their exposure to HDQ Neutral during disinfectant treatments?
4. How many detainees have experienced adverse side effects linked to HDQ Neutral? How many detainees have requested medical attention?
5. How are detainees being treated for side effects linked to exposure to HDQ Neutral or other disinfectants being used at the Adelanto Detention Facility?
6. Are there other ICE detention facilities nationwide where HDQ Neutral is being used for the purposes of preventing the spread of COVID-19?
7. Are there safe, non-toxic alternatives that may be used that are proven as effective at disinfecting surfaces for the purposes of preventing the spread of COVID-19? If so, has DHS or the GEO Group considered using these alternatives at detention facilities?

Thank you for your prompt investigation in this matter. We respectfully request answers to these questions no later than June 30, 2020. Should you have any questions about this request, please contact Adrienne.Castro@mail.house.gov at (202) 225 - 2305 or Eddie.Meyer@mail.house.gov at (202) 225 - 8045.

Sincerely,



MARK TAKANO
Member of Congress



JUAN VARGAS
Member of Congress