OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

CITY OF BALTIMORE

Isabel Mercedes Cumming

Inspector General

Investigative Report Synopsis

OIG Case # 27-0001-I

Issued: July 9, 2026

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
City Hall, Suite 635
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

July 9, 2026

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

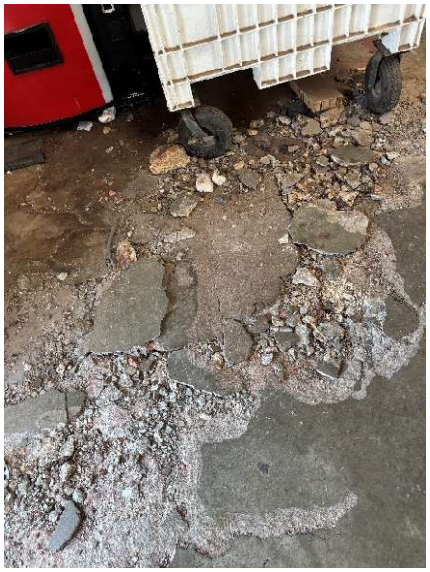
The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to independently promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to independently investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse. The following synopsis is a condensed version of the full report provided to City management officials and does not contain all investigative information.

The OIG received a complaint alleging poor working conditions at the Department of Public Works' (DPW) Patapsco Wastewater Treatment Plant (Patapsco Plant) located at 3501 Asiatic Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21226. The complainant alleged that DPW employees work in unsafe work conditions and were currently working in extreme heat with temperatures at 86° Fahrenheit (F).

Working Conditions

On July 1, 2026, the OIG visited various sections of the Patapsco Plant and spoke to DPW employees onsite. The OIG visited a building that employees referred to as the Return 2 building at the Patapsco Plant. At a door entrance that employees used, the OIG observed cracked and broken concrete flooring (Figures 1 and 2).

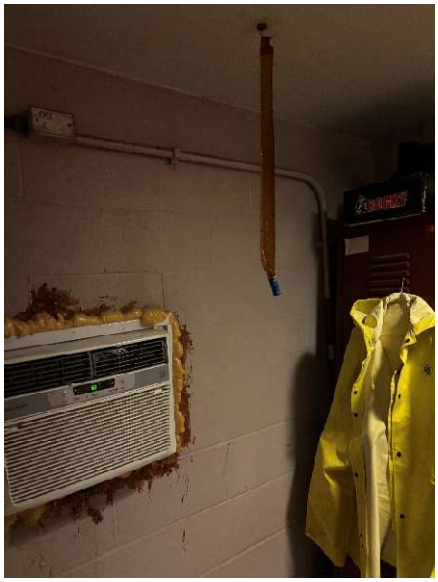
Figures 1 and 2: Flooring at doorway



The air-conditioning in the main hallways appeared to work and was cooling the area, but employees reported that it typically does not cool the building. During the site visit, the OIG observed maintenance being performed on the building's air-conditioning. The building's main air-conditioning system does not extend to the men's locker room and other areas. The temperature inside the men's locker room was 89.6°F (Figure 3). The air-conditioner affixed to the wall and secured with seemingly spray foam was

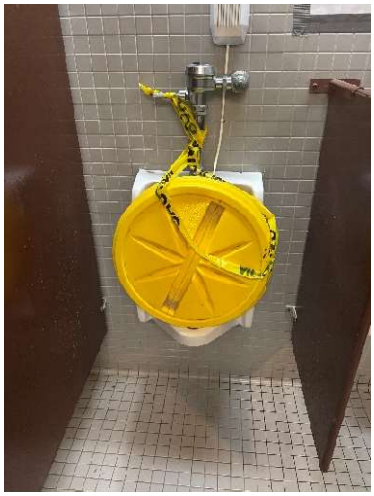
not working despite being set at 60°F (Figure 4). A water cooler was also located in a hallway with water in it.

Figures 3 and 4: Temperature and air-conditioner in men's locker room area .



Employees reported that the showers were not functioning and that there was a broken urinal in the locker room. Employees stated they are unable to wash contaminants off if they get "sludge" or chemicals on them due to the showers not functioning. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "sludge" means any solid, semi-solid, or liquid waste generated from a municipal, commercial, or industrial wastewater treatment plant, water supply treatment plant, or air pollution control facility exclusive of the treated effluent from a wastewater treatment plant.[1]

Figures 5-7: Inoperable showers and urinal



[1] https://archive.epa.gov/epawaste/hazard/web/pdf/i-sludge.pdf

An employee on-site explained that the doors are propped open because there is poor ventilation for the chemicals being used. The employee described being able to see a chemical haze upon arrival in the building (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Door propped open due to chemical smell

According to an employee, chemicals are used to bind the sludge together inside the building. The chemical room is in the basement of the building. The OIG observed large tanks of the chemicals, which the employee explained contain ferric chloride and polymer (Figure 9). The OIG observed a ventilation fan that was not working, and the employee reported it has been broken for several years (Figure 10). This may violate Occupational Safety and Health regulations regarding ventilation.[2] The employee stated ferric chloride residue stayed on the walls behind the tanks.

Figure 9: Chemical Tanks with residue on wall

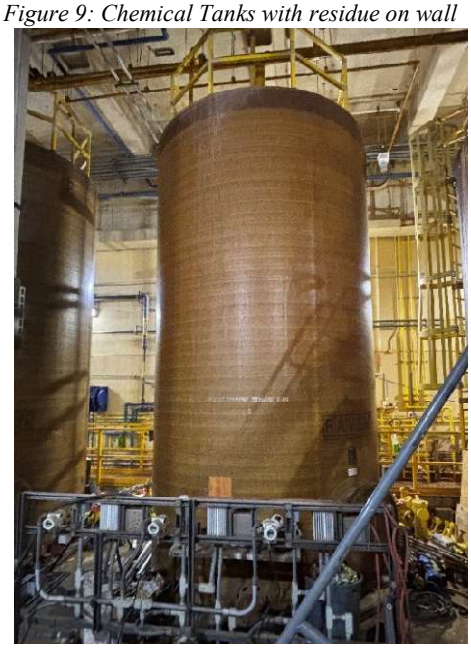


Figure 10: Ventilation fan not functioning

[2] https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1926/1926.57

Inside the area, the OIG could smell the chemicals and feel the hot humidity, which appeared to contribute to poor air quality. An employee stated that several employees have reported feeling sick and fatigued with flu-like symptoms. The OIG learned there is an illness associated with the chemicals called polymer fume fever.[3]

In the employee breakroom, a newer stove was observed, but the kitchen sink, microwave and prep area, were rusting and dirty (Figure 11). The vents in the employee breakroom had an unknown black particulate matter on them (Figures 12&13).

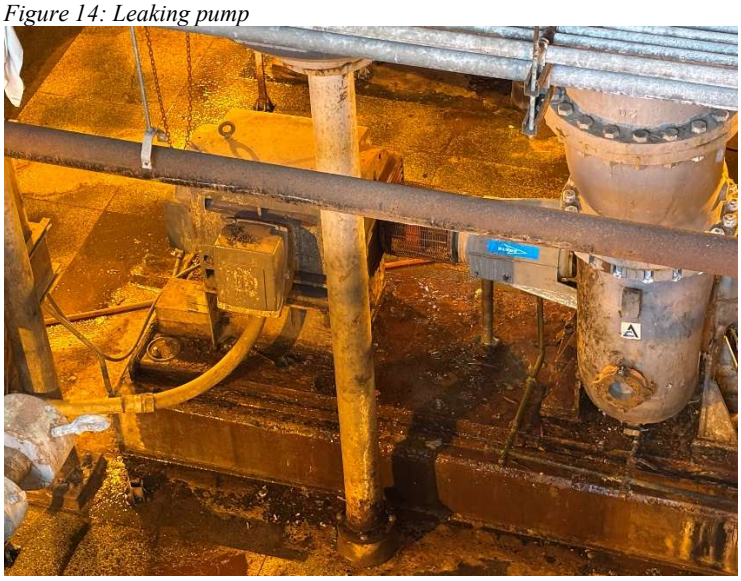
Figure 11: Kitchen sink and microwave area

Figures 12&13: Unknown black particulate matter on vents

[3] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25706449/

The OIG visited the Pump and Blower building at the Patapsco Plant. The OIG observed a pump that was leaking and pooling on the floor (Figure 14 & Exhibit 1).[4] One employee stated it was leaking, while another employee claimed the pump was supposed to be "dripping" and someone would come to clean it up (Figure 14). The pump area can be visible from the men's locker room.

Figure 14: Leaking pump

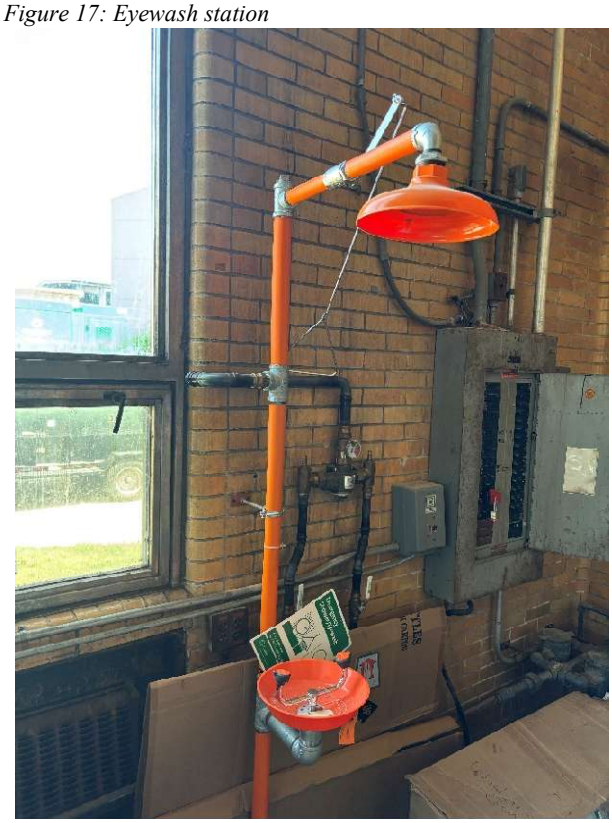


The chemical lab room had an air conditioner affixed to the wall which worked and cooled the room. However, it was reported that there was no working water system in the room, causing the eyewash station to be inoperable and making it difficult to clean the room (Figures 15-17).

Figures 15-16: Chemical lab room

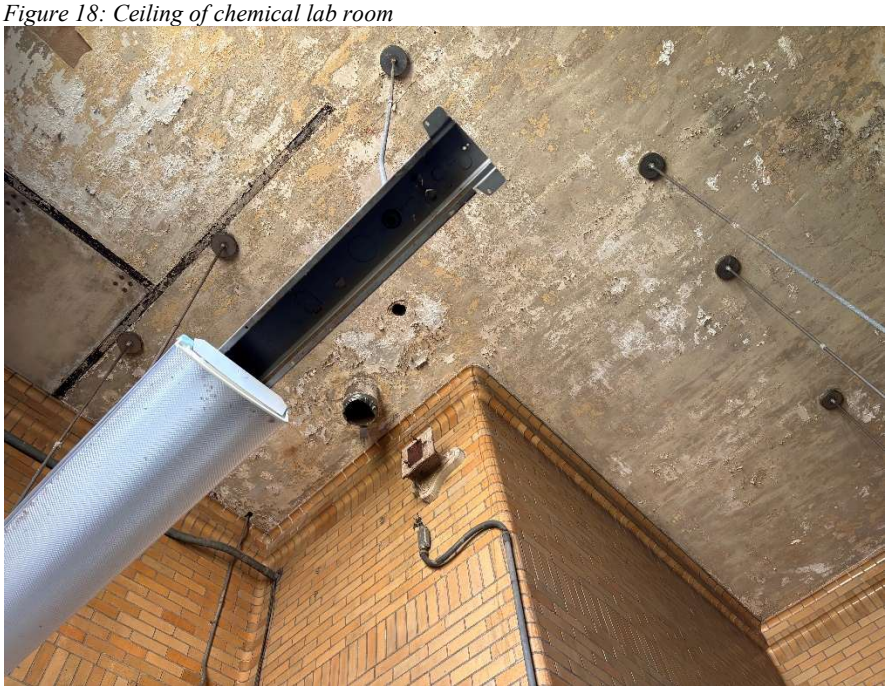
[4] Exhibit 1 is a video file that will be sent along with this report.

Figure 17: Eyewash station



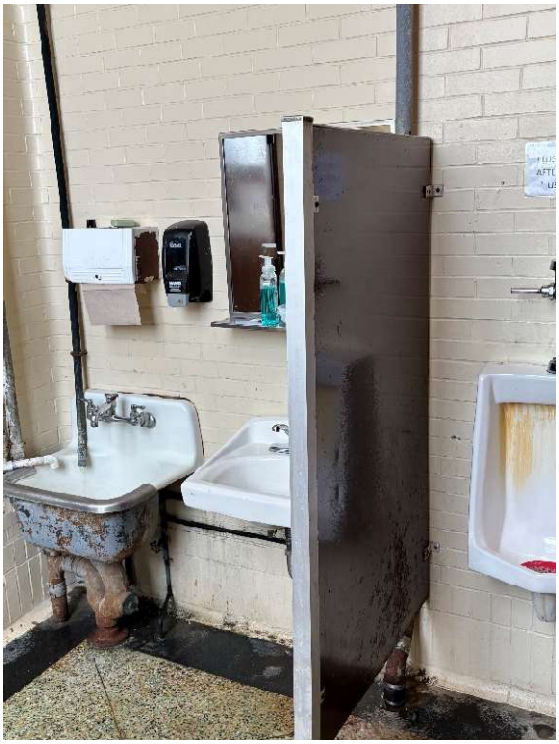
The ceiling in the room appeared in poor condition and was flaking (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Ceiling of chemical lab room



The bathroom in the building also appeared dirty, and there was paint flaking from the ceiling.

Figures 19&20: Bathroom area and ceiling



An employee showed the weir tanks outside the building and stated they sometimes overflow and spill into the ground, which is located near the water shoreline.

Findings/Recommendations

The OIG's observations during the July 1st site visit to the Patapsco Plant raise concerns about DPW's compliance with Occupational Safety and Health regulations, including the Maryland Heat Stress Illness Prevention Standard,[5] ventilation standards, and the Memorandums of Understanding with City labor unions.

With the Code Red Extreme Heat Alert in effect through July 4, 2026, and the National Weather Service's forecast of a 104°F temperature for July 2nd, the OIG recommended immediate action to be taken to explore alternatives and long-term solutions for reoccurring temperature concerns throughout the summer months.

The City removed the OIG's direct access to records, files, and communications on February 6, 2026. The OIG currently has 13 outstanding subpoenas for correspondence, 9 of which were provided to BCIT and the Law Department in March 2026. The OIG is unable to directly access and review correspondence in a timely manner related to investigations, including this serious safety matter.

[5] The Maryland Heat Stress Standards apply when employees are exposed to a heat index that equals or exceeds 80°F: Heat Stress - Maryland Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH))

The OIG wishes to thank DPW for their prompt response and action to the safety concerns.

Sincerely,

Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City
Hon. Zeke Cohen, Baltimore City Council President
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council
Hon. Ebony Thompson, Baltimore City Solicitor

Exhibits

1. Video of leaking pump

Department of Public Works
Response
Case # 27-0001-I

CITY OF BALTIMORE
BRANDON M. SCOTT, Mayor

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
Matthew W Garbark, Director
Abel Wolman Municipal Building, 6th Floor
200 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

July 8, 2026

Ms. Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General
100 North Holliday Street, Suite 640
Baltimore, MD 21202

RE: DPW Response to OIG Case #25-0027-I, dated July 1, 2026

Inspector General Cumming:

This correspondence will serve as the Department of Public Works' (DPW) official management response to OIG Management Alert OIG Case #27-0027-I, dated July 1, 2026 (the "Alert"). The Alert references a complaint alleging poor working conditions at the Department of Public Works' (DPW) Patapsco Wastewater Treatment Plant (Patapsco Plant) located at 3501 Asiatic Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21226. The complainant alleged that DPW employees work in unsafe work conditions and were currently working in extreme heat with temperatures at 86° Fahrenheit (F).

We have removed all loose rock and debris and completed concrete repairs to the areas noted in Figures 1 and 2 of the Alert.

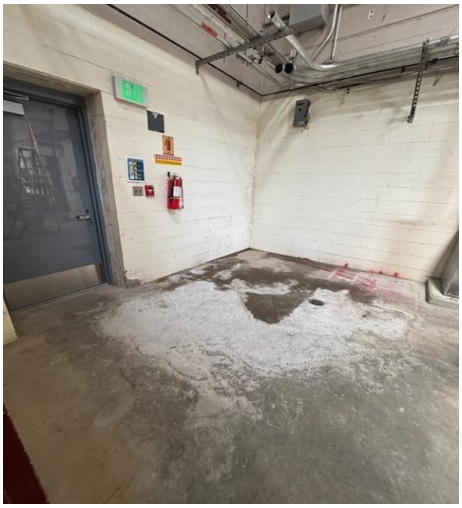


Figure 1. Floor repair at entrance to RSPS 2

In response to the air-conditioning system and its availability, DPW had a contractor on site during the OIG visit to address the HVAC repairs. The repairs to the building's HVAC system were completed on the day of the 7/1 visit. Regarding the temperature in the locker room and the air conditioner, upon follow-up inspection on 7/2/26, we checked the air conditioning unit itself and found the discharge air was 60° F, while the wall temperature across the locker room was 76° F. **See figures 2 and 3 below**

Figure 2. Temperature on AC discharge

Figure 3. Temperature on wall across from AC unit

During our initial walk-through on 7/2, we discovered the unit was off upon entry, so we turned it back on. Note that if the air conditioner is turned off by staff, the room temperature will rise to a concerning level, so running the unit consistently is important. We also noted the air conditioner filter was clean and free of buildup. **See Figure 4 below**. To take the heat concerns a bit further, we also have a pedestal fan near the locker room entrance to help move the building's conditioned air through the locker room. **See figure 5 below.**

Figure 4. AC Filter free of debris

Figure 5. Pedestal fan available for use

Regarding the noted issues with the showers and a broken urinal, both items were submitted for replacement/upgrades previously and are in the process of being scheduled for completion. Additional shower areas and bathrooms are available in the primary and Enhanced Nutrient Removal (ENR) areas for staff, while the showers at Return Sludge Pump Station 2 (RSPS 2) are being addressed. In response, we have closed off the locker room area in the RSPS 2 building, leaving the bathroom usable and accessible, and have temporarily relocated staff to the Primary and ENR Building's locker room areas to store their belongings, allowing improvements to the necessary facilities. **See figures 6 and 7 below.** Additionally, there is a second fully functional urinal directly adjacent to the currently out-of-service urinal. **See figure 8 below.**

Figure 6. Restricted Access to RSPS 2 shower

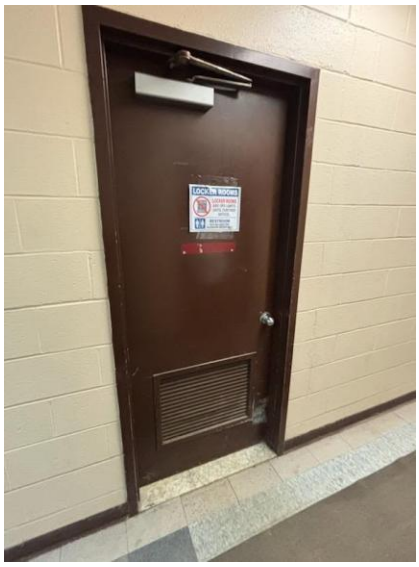


Figure 7. RSPS 2 Men's Room Door w/signage

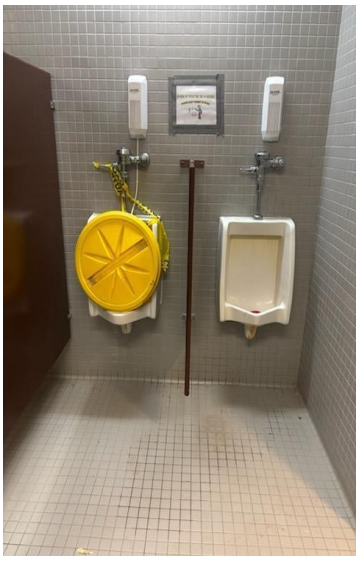


Figure 8. Men's Room Urinals

In Figure 8 of the Alert, there is a reference to the need to prop the door open due to poor ventilation and a chemical smell. A work order for the exhaust fan was submitted for repairs on 6/29/26, and a temporary fan unit was installed in the area on 7/2/26 to address residual odors while the permanent fan repair is being completed (see Figure 9). Regarding the residue on the wall, on 7/2/2026, operators were instructed to spray down the walls to eliminate any residual drops; however, the staining is permanent and should not be construed as a danger. The staining is an inherent result of using iron (ferric). Neither our leadership nor our Safety team has a record of any complaints regarding odors in this area. Nevertheless, we will reiterate to staff the importance of promptly reporting any workplace health or safety concerns to management. In addition, we will engage our internal Industrial Hygienist to evaluate the employee concerns noted regarding air quality.

Figure 9. Temporary fan for RSPS exhaust

For the break room area, demolition of the sink and cabinet area will be completed by 7/9/2026 to prepare for replacement with a new stainless steel area. The replacement of the sink/cabinet area was in progress prior to the OIG visit, as the new sink area was already on site for installation. The installation itself was delayed due to limited carpentry staff out on medical leave. While the work is underway, the break room has been closed off, and staff have access to alternative lunch facilities in the nearby ENR building. Cleaning of the ceiling vents and, if necessary, replacement of ceiling tiles will also occur during this time. **See Figure 10 below** for details on restricted access to the break room.

Figure 10, RSPS 2 Break Room – Restricted Access

The leaking pump noted in Figure 14 was investigated by our mechanical staff on 7/6/26 and repaired. **See video in EXHIBIT A**

All items identified in the laboratory area, as shown in Figures 15–20 of the report, are part of a planned laboratory rehabilitation to be addressed in a future project phase. This laboratory is currently out of service and not utilized by staff. While staff have been informally notified, we will issue formal communication regarding the lab's closure and post signage at all entry points to prevent any further confusion. The permanent eyewash station will be installed and made operational in conjunction with the laboratory rehabilitation and the subsequent return of the space to active service.

We will repaint the ceiling referenced in Figure 19. The bathroom shown in Figure 20 is cleaned regularly and was clean during the OIG visit. The visible staining in the photograph is due to hard water rather than a cleanliness issue.

DPW remains fully committed to maintaining healthy and safe working conditions and will hold leaders accountable when these standards are not upheld.

We welcome the OIG to visit the Wastewater Treatment Plants with or without prior notice. It is important to note, however, that all personnel must wear the appropriate personal protective equipment while on site and must always be escorted due to the hazardous operating environment. Unannounced visits are not uncommon, as both the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Environmental Protection Agency conduct routine inspections and follow the same safety protocols, since safety requirements for facility access are paramount.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. If you have any further questions regarding this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact DPW's Chief of Staff, LaToya Curtis, at LaToya.Curtis@baltimorecity.gov or at 410-545-3501.

Best Regards,

Alan D. Robinson

For Matthew W. Garbark, Director
Alan D. Robinson
Deputy Director

OIG Referral #27-001-I EXHIBIT A

IMG_0231.3gp

Video of Repaired Pump