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For KIDS**September 21, 2001****NYC Monitoring Efforts Continue to Show Safe Drinking Water & Air**

EPA Administrator Christie Whitman announced today that the most detailed results to date of ongoing monitoring of drinking water in New York City provide additional reassurance that city residents are not being exposed to dangerous contaminants including asbestos, radiation, mercury and other metals, pesticides, PCBs and bacteria.

"As we continue to monitor drinking water in and around New York City, and as EPA gets more comprehensive analysis of this monitoring data, I am relieved to be able to reassure New York and New Jersey residents that a host of potential contaminants are either not detectable or are below the Agency's concern levels," Whitman said. "Results we have just received on drinking water quality show that not only is asbestos not detectable, but also we can not detect any bacterial contamination, PCBs or pesticides," she continued.

Whitman confirmed that EPA personnel, working in coordination with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection at and around the World Trade Center disaster site, have thus far taken a total of 13 drinking water samples from water mains in lower Manhattan. In addition to analyzing the samples for asbestos, pesticides and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls, which are mixtures of synthetic organic chemicals), EPA has also tested drinking water for metals (including mercury), and radioactivity (both alpha and beta). None of these contaminants exceeded EPA drinking water standards.

"In addition to carefully evaluating drinking water in the New York area, EPA has taken samples at the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, where runoff from lower Manhattan goes for treatment, to identify what sort of materials are leaving the disaster site," Whitman continued. "While we haven't yet gotten results for all possible contaminants, we do know that levels of metals and mercury are below permit discharge limits," she noted. However, Whitman did state that "following one rainstorm with particularly high runoff, we did have one isolated detection of slightly elevated levels of PCBs. This is something that we are continuing to monitor very closely." Other analysis of monitoring data taken at Newtown Creek treatment plant shows that total suspended solids and biochemical oxygen demand, common indicators of how well a wastewater treatment plant is operating, indicate that the plant is working within permit limits. The Agency will continue to collect water samples at storm water discharge points when it rains and to fully analyze the samples for asbestos, PCBs, metals and total suspended solids.

Whitman elaborated on the repeated monitoring of ambient air both at the World Trade Center disaster site and the surrounding area. To date the Agency has taken 97 air samples from 11 separate fixed monitoring sites in and around the "hot zone" and elsewhere in lower Manhattan, and four fixed monitoring sites located in New Jersey downwind from the blast. Only seven samples taken at or near ground zero have had marginally higher levels of asbestos that exceed EPA's level of concern. All rescue workers in this restricted-access area are being provided with appropriate safety equipment. Ambient air monitoring in the Financial District, where this week people have returned to work, show levels of asbestos that are below Agency levels of concern. Four samples taken specifically to identify if mercury is present resulted in non-detectable readings. On Sept. 19, EPA also took readings of outdoor air at numerous locations around ground zero for chemicals including hydrogen sulfide, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide. All readings indicated that levels were normal and posed no public health concern. All air samples taken in New Jersey have shown no detectable levels of asbestos whatsoever.

EPA has set up eight air monitors at the Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island, where debris from the collapsed World Trade Center towers is being sent for criminal and forensic analysis, and eventual disposal. Initial results show no detectable levels of asbestos. The Agency will continue to operate these air monitors at the landfill and will test for asbestos and for particulate matter.

Whitman detailed dust sampling undertaken thus far at the World Trade Center site, and confirmed that EPA has done a total of 101 dust samples, of which 37 were slightly over the one percent asbestos (the amount above which material is considered asbestos-containing). EPA has continued to use its 10 High Efficiency Particulate Arresting (HEPA) filter vacuum trucks, especially in areas where dust samples show any elevated levels of asbestos. Of the 16 samples taken in the Battery Park City area, a residential community within two blocks of the disaster site, 12 showed slightly elevated levels of asbestos. After using the HEPA Vac trucks to clean streets and surfaces in Battery Park City, repeat sampling in the area showed asbestos levels that fall below concern amounts. EPA will continue to monitor this area. The HEPA Vac trucks were also used to vacuum lobbies of federal buildings near the disaster site prior to having workers return.

Monitoring and cleanup efforts also continue at the Pentagon crash site. To date, EPA has taken 140 total samples, including ambient air samples, bulk debris analysis, silica and water discharge samples. Monitoring samples have been analyzed for asbestos and other hazardous materials. Available results continue to show that rescue workers at the disaster site are not being exposed to hazardous materials.

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