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EPA Watchdog Probes Effort At Ground Zero

Thursday, January 10, 2002; Page A02

NEW YORK, Jan. 9 -- The Environmental Protection Agency's ombudsman has ordered an investigation into how the agency handled air quality in the World Trade Center area after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

EPA ombudsman Robert J. Martin, responding to a Jan. 8 article in The Washington Post about health concerns around the site, asked the agency to hand over documents on how well it informed the public about testing it had done for hazardous materials, such as asbestos and benzene.

Agency officials also have been asked to show whether they knew that the kind of asbestos testing they did was flawed because it did not pick up finely pulverized

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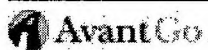
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asbestos dust that seeped into nearby offices and apartment buildings.

"If the allegations reported in The Washington Post are true, EPA has done a disservice to the brave men and women working at 'ground zero' and to the citizens who live in the area whose health and environment we are required to protect," Martin wrote.

Since becoming ombudsman in 1992, Martin has opened 35 investigations and has clashed with EPA officials on their handling of hazardous waste sites under the Superfund program. He does not have the authority to settle disputes, but he can investigate complaints about EPA actions.

-- Christine Haughney

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