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From-Health Dept. Public Affairs

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NYC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PRESENTS FINDINGS FROM
INDOOR AIR SAMPLING IN LOWER MANHATTAN

*Analysis of Air Samples Taken from Residential Buildings in Lower Manhattan Indicates No
Elevation of Asbestos in Air. Low Levels of Asbestos and Some Fiberglass Found in Dust Samples.
DOH Reminds Residents of Importance of Cleaning to Reduce Dust.*

As part of an ongoing effort to assess the environmental impact of the World Trade Center (WTC) disaster and to respond to public health concerns, the New York City Department of Health (DOH) in collaboration with the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) conducted indoor and outdoor tests of thirty residential buildings in lower Manhattan.

The tests examined samples of both air and dust. The air samples from inside the buildings showed no elevated levels of asbestos. The air sampling results for fibrous glass (fiberglass) are not yet available. The dust showed low levels of asbestos in some samples and the presence of fiberglass in other samples. The potential for exposure to these materials depends not only on their concentration in the dust but also on the amount of dust that is present. Asbestos and fiberglass can pose a health risk if dust accumulates and particles become airborne. While these findings are not unexpected, they underscore the importance of proper cleaning to reduce dust.

DOH is sending letters to building owners and residents informing them of the test results; flyers are also being distributed in lower Manhattan. The letters and flyers emphasize the importance of following DOH's cleaning recommendations to prevent dust from becoming airborne, especially while work continues at the WTC site. In addition to distributing information to residents, DOH is holding community meetings in association with Manhattan Community Board No. 1 to directly address any remaining concerns.

Residents are being advised to use a wet mop, damp cloth, or a high efficiency particulate air filter (HEPA) vacuum to clean dust from hard surfaces, and HEPA vacuums to clean carpets, upholstery, and other items that cannot be cleaned by wet wiping. To prevent the recirculation of dust, residents are advised *not* to sweep with "dry" brooms, or to use dusters or vacuums without approved HEPA filters. Since fiberglass can be irritating to the skin, rubber gloves can be used to provide skin protection. Residents were also advised to avoid carrying dust into their buildings from outdoors (e.g., by taking off shoes).

New York City Health Commissioner Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH said, "Since the collapse of the World Trade Center, an event that resulted in the release of large amounts of dust and other

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airborne particles, some residents of lower Manhattan have reported short-term health problems such as cough, and irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat. The data from air quality tests thus far have been reassuring. None of the testing to date has shown results that would indicate long-term health impacts. However, conclusive scientific knowledge about the potential health hazards of some substances is not available. DOH recognizes residents' concerns and will continue to work closely with local, state and Federal agencies to monitor air quality and to inform the public of findings as soon as results are available." Dr. Frieden continued.

"Additionally, DOH has been working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop a protocol for a World Trade Center Registry, which, if funded, would generate and maintain a database that can be used as a basis for conducting studies that can provide a more complete picture of short- and long-term health and mental health impacts among the affected populations," Dr. Frieden concluded.

Sampling Summary

At the request of DOH, ATSDR conducted tests in 59 apartments in 30 geographically representative buildings in lower Manhattan in November and December 2001. Testing was also conducted in four buildings above 59th Street to provide information on the background level of various substances present indoors in New York City. Using widely accepted testing methods, the agency looked for several materials that are common building components or could potentially cause short and long-term health problems. Each set of tests included samples of air and settled dust, and these samples were analyzed for fiber-like materials - asbestos, fibrous glass - and for other particles including silica, gypsum, mica, and calcite.

A total of 117 samples were taken from 30 buildings in lower Manhattan and analyzed for airborne fibers. Samples were taken inside residences, in common areas within residential buildings, and outside of the buildings. The air samples from inside the buildings showed no elevated levels of asbestos. Levels were similar to those seen in areas not affected by the World Trade Center collapse.

The analysis of 98 dust samples for asbestos taken from the inside and outside of residential buildings in lower Manhattan indicated that while 20% were above background levels, only two samples which were taken from outdoors required abatement. Professional abatement work was completed in this area.

Samples taken from inside and outside of residential buildings in lower Manhattan were analyzed for fibrous glass. Fibrous glass was detected in 43 of the 98 samples taken. The results of air sampling for fibrous glass, and for air and surface testing of other materials, are not yet available.

Health Information about Asbestos and Fiberglass

The risk of developing these diseases from environmental exposures depends on the level and duration of exposure.

Exposure to asbestos is associated with asbestosis (scarring of the lungs) and cancer. The likelihood of developing disease from limited, short-term, low-level exposure is low. There is no reliable test that can indicate whether an individual has had low-level exposures to asbestos. In the occupational

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setting, where the duration and intensity of asbestos exposure can be greater, there is a higher risk to workers. Workers at the WTC site need to use the appropriate protective equipment to reduce exposure. Exposure to some forms of fibrous glass (fiberglass) can cause cough, and eye, nose, skin, and throat irritation. Long-term health effects associated with fibrous glass are not completely known and standards for measurement of fibrous glass in environmental samples are not well established. Although fiberglass is classified as a possible carcinogen, recent studies of more than 30,000 industrial workers who worked with fiberglass found no conclusive evidence of an increased risk of cancer.

Additional information about the indoor testing initiative is available on the DOH Web site at nyc.gov/health. A comprehensive report on this testing will be available this spring. Final test results will be released to the public as soon as they become available. Results of outdoor sampling since September 11 of air, water, and dust – including sampling for asbestos and particulate matter – are posted on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website, epa.gov, and can also be found on the New York City Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) website at nyc.gov/dep. WTC-related information can also be found at nyc.gov/health.

Information on the *Project Liberty* program, a statewide disaster-recovery initiative that offers free crisis counseling, education, and referral services to anyone affected by the World Trade Center disaster, is available by calling 1-800-LIFENET or 1-800-543-3638.

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