

Hillary calls for WTC air study

■ Workers and neighborhood residents have developed many respiratory problems since attacks

By VERENA DOBNIK
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sen. Hillary Clinton vowed this weekend to harness the federal government in studying the air quality at the World Trade Center disaster site and the health effects on thousands of people who have breathed it.

Clinton said she had requested a Senate hearing on the subject, scheduled for Feb. 11 in New York. The hearing will be led by Sen. Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, who serves with Clinton on the Environment and Public Works committee.

Since the Sept. 11 terror attacks, workers at the trade center and neighborhood residents have developed respiratory problems, including the so-called "World Trade Center cough" and various other symptoms from shortness of breath to wheezing, she said.

But the long-term effects of

breathing the air rising from the debris are still under debate, with medical experts disagreeing on the seriousness of exposure to air that may contain possible carcinogens including asbestos and PCBs.

"Unfortunately, we do not really know what our firefighters, police officers, EMTs and others have been exposed to as a result of their courageous efforts at ground zero, but it is our responsibility to find those answers," Clinton said.

Clinton spoke outside a Manhattan firehouse that lost 11 firefighters at the trade center. The department lost a 343 members in the tragedy.

Clinton said she had discussed the importance of monitoring the health of rescue workers both with officials of the Environmental Protection Agency and of the United Firefighters' Association, which represents most city firefighters.

Dr. David Prezant, a Fire Department lung specialist who joined Clinton at the firehouse, said that of the 8,000 people who have been examined so far, those who worked at ground zero in the first days after the attacks showed the most serious respiratory symptoms; some are now being treated with steroids, antibiotics and other medications, he said.

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