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E.P.A. May Expand Plan To Clean Apartments

By KIRK JOHNSON

Federal officials said yesterday that the government's new commitment to clean any apartment south of Canal Street in Manhattan, to remove dust and debris from the World Trade Center disaster, might be expanded to include reimbursement for residents who have already had their homes professionally cleaned.

They also said the cleanup program, which was officially announced yesterday at a news conference at the Manhattan regional headquarters of the Environmental Protection Agency, could be extended to include apartments outside the boundaries if testing suggests the need for it. Depending on what is found in the residential work, the interiors of businesses may eventually be included as well, they said.

"No one should have to live with anxiety about the safety of the air in their own homes," said Jane Kenny, the E.P.A.'s regional administrator.

The cleanup program, which is expected to begin next month, reverses the position that was taken after Sept. 11 by federal, local and state government officials, who insisted that Lower Manhattan residents and business owners were responsible for cleaning their own spaces.

Under the new policy, the federal government has committed money to the cleanup, apparently without limit. "The most important message is that FEMA, our federal partner, has not said this is all there is," said Christopher O. Ward, the city's commissioner of environmental protection, referring to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which will pay for the work.

E.P.A. officials said that according to their initial estimates, 15,000 apartments will be covered by the plan, and that cleanup by a contractor for a typical two-bedroom apartment might cost \$3,000 to \$5,000. If every resident participates and each apartment is within that range, that would bring the cost to \$45 million to \$75 million, not including the possible expansion and reimbursement plans mentioned yesterday.

At the news conference, Ms. Kenny and other city and federal officials strongly rejected any suggestion that waiting eight months after the disaster to begin a cleaning program for New York's interior spaces has put residents at risk. The collapse of the trade center towers blasted dust and ash, some of which contained asbestos or other potentially harmful materials, across a wide area of the city, including parts of Brooklyn.

In fact, Mr. Ward said, the new cleanup program could validate what health and environmental officials have said all along: that most apartment interiors were not contaminated.

The degree of participation will probably depend on whether inviting government apartment cleaners into one's home sounds reassuring or intrusive. The cleanups could take two to three days, officials said. The E.P.A. will set up a telephone number for the program by the end of the month, officials said.

Representative Jerrold Nadler, a Manhattan Democrat who also spoke at the news conference, said he would work to see that apartments were cleaned en masse, with every resident participating so that no dust or debris is left over to be tracked back into cleaned spaces.

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