

e-mailed to
DOH 3/6/02
Revised Draft

Q & A for Hotline

I. BUILDING RELATED ISSUES

A. Landlords/Enforcement

- **How do I know my landlord had the HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) system properly cleaned?**

Contact your building owner and request this information. Building owners were advised by DEP to change filters in ventilation systems if they found debris after 9/11. Building owners were also requested to have debris assessed for the presence of asbestos by a certified asbestos investigator. If you have further questions, you can contact DEP at www.nyc.gov/dep.

(deleted question)

- **What can I do about buildings or building areas that have not been cleaned (roofs, window sills, fire escapes, lobbies, hallways)? What agency enforces building cleaning?**

We can take your contact information and information on the building of concern and provide it to DEP. DEP is the agency enforcing the cleaning requirements. These requirements for cleaning vary based on the hazard assessment.

- **My landlord had the building cleaned back in September but he has not done anything since. Whom can I call to make sure (enforce) he continues to clean?**

The City has issued a new fact sheet on cleaning procedures reminding people in lower Manhattan to continue frequent cleaning. We can take your name and address and send you information in the mail. In addition, we can forward your concerns to DEP.

- **Terraces & balconies: Who is responsible for cleaning? Is it safe to clean the terrace if there is a lot of dust? What can I do if I cleaned my terrace but others in my building have not and the dust blows into my apartment?**

Light coatings of dust can be cleaned using wet methods and /or HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) vacuums made by different manufacturers. (List available) An inspector should assess large accumulations of debris. I can take your name and contact information and forward it to DEP.

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B. Cleaning

- **Does the Department have any recommendations about which brands of HEPAvacs or Air Purifiers provide the best safety features?**

Information on steps people can take to assist with indoor air quality and on the selection and purchase of residential air cleaning devices can be found at the EPA website:
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/index.html>

How can people who live north of Canal St. obtain a free HEPAvac and/or Air Purifier?

Currently there is not a program that provides free cleaning equipment for residents north of Canal St.

- **Is an Ionizer as effective as a HEPA filter? What is the difference between an Avena purifier vs. a HEPA filter?**

Ionizers are not suitable replacements for the use of HEPAvacs. Information can be found on the EPA website:
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/index.html>
 (What is an AVENA purifier? Is it like a Honeywell and Electroaire??)

- **Why are people not routinely recommended to wear a mask while cleaning?**

Dust/paint masks do not provide protection from asbestos or fiberglass. In lower Manhattan, people will typically not be exposed to fibers and dust at levels of health concern as long as they are using wet cleaning methods, a HEPA vacuum, and they are not cleaning up areas with large amounts of WTC-related materials. Cleaning up such areas should be left to certified professionals.

C. Indoor Air Testing

- **Will the Health Department conduct more indoor air testing? (will you come and test my apartment?)**

The results of indoor air and dust testing have not shown elevated levels of asbestos. Low levels of asbestos have been found in some indoor dust samples, but not at levels that exceeded regulatory standards. We are recommending that residents of lower Manhattan conduct frequent cleaning using wet methods.

- **When will the final results of the ATSDR (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry) indoor air sampling be**

made available? What other substances besides asbestos and fiberglass are being analyzed?

The final report on the indoor air sampling should be completed by April. Substances being analyzed in the air samples are asbestos, fibrous glass and particulate matter. Substances being analyzed in the dust samples include asbestos, fibrous glass, silica, mica, calcite, gypsum, and the pH of this material.

- **For how many hours did the air sampling occur in the DOH/ATSDR indoor air sampling? Don't particles and substances increase during the night hours?**

Air pumps operated until they had sampled a large enough volume of air to meet the criteria in the sampling methodology. Typically, this time period was from 5-8 hours. The focus of this project was indoor sampling. The levels of dust and fibers indoors are most affected by the activities inside a residence, not the time of day.

- **Why is there no mention of heavy metals tested indoors?**

Outdoor monitoring around the WTC worksite and indoor sampling conducted in schools near the site have, in general, not found elevated levels of heavy metals. Thus they are not considered a priority substance to be tested indoors.

- **Is lead still being tested indoors?**

Yes. Lead sampling is still being conducted, particularly in schools. In the rare instances that it has been discovered in schools, those areas have been thoroughly cleaned.

(What about outdoor testing??)

- **What companies conduct indoor air and dust testing?**

Names of environmental consultant firms can be found in the yellow pages under "Environmental Consulting". The city cannot endorse specific contractors so we are not recommending any specific firms.

- **What standard is the DOH using to determine "acceptable levels" for indoor air? How do you answer the charge from others that the standards being used are not protective of health, given the unique circumstances of the WTC collapse?**

In evaluating data from the WTC and the surrounding areas, the DOH is using a protective standard under AHERA (Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act) to evaluate the risk. This is the standard normally used to decide when children may re-enter school buildings following asbestos-removal activities. The Department of Environmental Protection requires an asbestos abatement if more than 1% of dust in a bulk sample contains asbestos fibers.

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D. Air Conditioners

- **Is it safe to run air conditioners? How do you know if your air conditioner is contaminated? How should air conditioners be cleaned? If there is dust settled on the outside will it enter into the air inside?**

We recommend that you be diligent in replacing your air conditioner filters often since these filters serve as a trap for fibers and particulate matter. Outdoor air samples have indicated that air quality meets the current standards. However, if visible accumulations of debris are observed near the air conditioner's intake, the accumulations should be cleaned using vacuums equipped with HEPA filters and wet methods.

- **How should air conditioners be cleaned? (This question was incorporated above as the answer was the same as the above.)**

- **How often should air conditioners filters be replaced?**

This depends on the manufacturer's specifications and recommendations. Residents should check the filters on a regular basis to determine whether they need replacement. They cannot be changed too often, so please err on the side of caution and replace them frequently (once a month while debris cleanup is still occurring outdoors?) (If fixed line 3)

- **Can you buy a HEPA filter that will fit into an air conditioner? Some air conditioners are not compatible with HEPA filters.**

We are not aware of any air conditioner brands that can be retrofitted with a HEPA filter.

II HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

A. Health Effects

- **What is the DOH doing to protect residents' health? (Some people report that they have asthma as a result of the air, as well as other symptoms. While symptoms have decreased over the past few months, there remain concerns about coughs, upper respiratory stress, etc.)**

The DOH along with DEP and several other government agencies are performing a number of tasks including the review of air quality data, assessing and mitigating risks caused by asbestos containing material, enforcing the Commissioner's Order to ensure that all

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debris loaded into trucks at the site are wetted down and covered with tarps. They also conduct extensive community outreach and education.

Particulate matter and sulfur oxides in the air may cause temporary airway irritation. The composition of these particles may be alkaline which produce respiratory irritation. To date there is no evidence that these symptoms will result in long term health problems. If you think you are having health effects related to the air quality in your environment, please address these health concerns with your physician.

- **When will the health registry be established? Will it study the health effects from environmental exposures? (added "health" before registry)**

The Department has been working to establish a registry for various populations affected by the WTC collapse. The specific design and function of this registry are still being developed. Ultimately it will serve as a database from which researchers can study the health effects of the WTC collapse and the aftermath.

- **A local physician testified that he has seen patients who are residents that living near the WTC with significant health effects (upper respiratory stress, asthma, etc.). What does that mean for other nearby residents downwind from the site?**

The illness observed by this physician in some of his patients cannot necessarily be linked to exposure to WTC without information on how and where these individuals were exposed. Illnesses were observed in the rescue workers and others who were near WTC on 9/11 and immediately there after. However, the air data collected by EPA and other agencies since that period indicate that for the general public, significant health effects are unlikely. Just like some people have allergies; there may be more sensitive individuals in the general population who are exhibiting these short term health effects.

- **Do residents need to see a physician that is a respiratory specialist for air exposure concerns?**

If you are experiencing difficulty breathing or have symptoms that are different than what you've experienced before, you should seek medical attention. This person does not necessarily need to be a respiratory specialist.

B. Children

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- **Is it safe for children to breathe the air? Since they have smaller lungs and their bodies are still developing, do the standards for determining the health effects of toxins in the air take into account children's physical development?**
We agree the children are more vulnerable to environmental conditions. However, the air standards being used for environmental monitoring are designed to protect the more sensitive populations including children and the elderly. (added "the" before more)
- **Different pediatricians are giving different assessments of the impact on children? What is DOH's position?**
Every child/patient has unique genetic, physical and emotional reactions with some being more sensitive than others. The DOH cannot respond to individual patient symptoms. Individuals should seek medical attention if they are experiencing adverse health effects. The Mt. Sinai Pediatric Environmental Health Unit can also be contacted at www.mssm.edu/cpm/peds_envIRON.shtml or called at 1-866-265-6201.
- **In the indoor air testing, why did we sample the air at adult breathing levels and not lower levels where young children breathe? (The Mt. Sinai doctor's testimony indicated that we should be more concerned about children's exposures and that we aren't doing enough)**
The method used in the WTC Indoor Air Sampling Project was a standard method used for the general public. There should not be a significant difference in capturing what is in the air at those different breathing zones.

C. Asbestos

- **The indoor study found the presence of asbestos in the dust. Doesn't it take only one fiber of asbestos lodged in a lung to cause disease, and if so aren't we all at increased risk for disease?**
Studies of lung diseases caused by asbestos indicate that affected populations were exposed to large amounts of asbestos for long periods of time.
- **Don't we risk inhaling asbestos even if we wet clean and HEPAvac since the small fibers escape?**
Cleaning up small amounts of material using wet methods and HEPAvacs take into account the need to remove fibers of all sizes. A HEPAvac is designed to capture small fibers.

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- **Can toddlers (babies) ingest/inhale small asbestos fibers if they crawl on the rugs and floor (even though they have been cleaned)?**

Cleaning surfaces regularly greatly reduces the risk of any possible contamination. No one can provide any absolute guarantees about this or many other types of environmental exposures; we can only urge parents to keep their floors clean. (removed "but")

(Asbestos fact sheets faxed)

D. Communication with Local Health Providers

- **Doctors are prescribing antibiotics for the WTC cough. Is this the proper treatment?**

Antibiotics are useful for treating bacterial infections. Antibiotics are not recommended in most cases for allergies, viruses or for treating symptoms of respiratory irritation, unless there is an underlying bacterial infection.

- **What advice is the Health Department giving to local doctors?**

The DOH is working with physicians in the community to provide them with information on environmental monitoring and potential health effects. These health care providers include individuals working in schools, the fire department, police and other uniformed services. The DOH is available to answer physician's specific questions on environmental exposures and known health effects.

- **Is anyone collecting information from local doctors about the patients they are seeing?**

Most of the information being collected is on workers, particularly those who were first responders or worked directly at the WTC-site.

- **Are there recommendations for taking supplements to offset the effects of the dust in air?**

Herbal supplements, chelation therapies and other detoxification methods are not being recommended by the DOH.

- **Why isn't the DOH recommending that local residents be tested for toxins in the blood?**

Results of routine air monitoring have not indicated that medical testing for environmental contaminants is necessary in the general public. In addition, there are no reliable medical tests that can detect short-term, low level exposures to asbestos or other fibers (including fiberglass.) When medical tests are available for environmental contaminants, they only indicate previous

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exposures. These tests cannot determine where, when, or how long the individual was exposed or whether they will develop health effects related to these exposures.

Medical tests exist for heavy metals, including elemental mercury and lead. The preferred test for lead exposure is a blood test while the most accurate test for environmental exposure to elemental mercury is a urine test. The DOH has investigated reports of elevated mercury among four workers at the site and found that initial tests of blood mercury were slightly elevated. Blood mercury can be elevated if a person has consumed fish within sixty days of the test. Urine mercury is a more specific test for exposures to metallic (elemental) mercury, the type of mercury of concern for occupational exposures. Follow-up urine tests of these workers did not reveal elevated mercury levels. Personal air sampling at the site among individual workers found that mercury was not elevated in the air. Given these low levels found in both clinical and environmental sampling at the site, at this time testing residents for mercury levels is not warranted.

Medical tests exist to measure levels of PCBs and dioxins in blood, body fat, and breast milk, but these are not routinely conducted for community exposures because most people have low levels of these substances in their bodies already.

III OUTDOOR RELATED ISSUES

A. Outdoor Air Testing

- **Who is doing research on the synergistic effects of the various toxic substances together in the outdoor air?**

I understand DOH has answer.

- **Since the only standards for assessing the impact of asbestos are for occupational exposure over 20 years, does this mean that residents of Lower Manhattan could be more at risk for a shorter period of time since many people are in the area for 24 hour periods (NOT an 8 hour day like factory workers?)**
- **How do you respond to scientists who say that the standards being used to assess health impacts of asbestos are too low?**

B. Parks

- **Are local parks and playgrounds cleaned regularly? Can there be a sign posted as to when the park was last tested and cleaned?**

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We have an update on the parks and regular communication with the Parks Dept. We will have a separate answer sheet for questions related to parks.

- **Is soil in parks and playgrounds tested for asbestos and other toxic substances?**

Refer to Parks update above. Soil is not being tested. Per DPR, they hired a private contractor to test for asbestos and other contaminants and the results were negligible. The parks tested were Battery Park, City Hall Park, Bowling Green Park, Pearl Street Park and Washington Market Park (This last park had the sand in the sand box replaced.) The contact person is the Manhattan Chief of Operations, (212) 408-0212.

C. Debris Removal

- **Trucks not always wetting down and putting tarps over debris, whom should they call to complain?**

The Health Department enforces this. Take to complaint and pass on to the appropriate person at DOH.

- **Why can't the material (debris) on the trucks be containerized?**

Ask DDC to comment on this one. (OEM to f/u with DDC)

D. Barge

- **Noise complaints: banging from the barge is keeping people awake at night, who should they call to complain?**

This is enforced by DEP. Current practice has been to have person call 1-718- DEP-HELP and tell the operator that the noise is coming from the barge at West and Harrison St. and that the supervisor on call should be notified immediately

- **Dust: Debris is being dispersed through the air from the work at the barge.**

DDC enforces dust suppression procedures at Pier 25. However, DOH keeps a close watch over the Pier 25 operation. DOH Public Health Sanitarians are on-site and observe the operation daily. In addition, the air is continuously monitored and a tremendous amount of data, along with our visual observations, indicates that dust is not migrating from Pier 25 to the school.

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Diesel emissions: By law trucks cannot idle in a line longer than 5 minutes outside the entrance on West Street. DEP is enforcing this issue.

E. Streets

- **Not all streets are being wetted down, which agency can I report this to?**

Take complaint and refer to appropriate person at Dept. of Sanitation.

- **Battery Park City residents say dry sweepers are kicking up dust. There has been a change over the past several weeks and streets are no longer being wetted down.**

This has been dealt with. DOS has resumed wetting down. They will suspend when the air is below freezing to avoid icing the streets.

F. Sidewalks

- **What is being done to wet down sidewalks? Is this a landlord responsibility? For commercial areas who is responsible?**
DOS enforces sidewalk cleaning issues. Sidewalk complaints will be forwarded to DOS for enforcement response.

G. Other Outdoor Dust Issues

- **Gardens, bushes, planters outside of buildings that have not been cleaned. Who is responsible for cleaning these?**
Route to DEP.
- **Dumpsters filled with WTC debris. Which agency should be called?**
Route to DEP.
- **What happened to the dangerous chemicals (e.g. diesel) that burned in the buildings? Were they burned up or are they still seeping into the ground?**
Diesel fuel from storage tanks was discharged to the ground following the collapse. Much of the affected soil and debris was recovered and removed. Fuel spills to the ground and groundwater are being managed by NYSDEC. (718) 482-4933 (am confirming

no.) DOH is primarily interested in what might be discharged into the air. Air monitoring shows no airborne hazardous materials moving from the site.

IV OTHER ISSUES

A. Con Edison

- **When will Con Edison be finished tearing up the streets? DOT??**
- **There are placing 5 more Con Edison transformers in the sub station at South St. Seaport to replace the ones destroyed at 7 World Trade Center. What are the health effects of this increase in electric power capacity? What are effects of electric magnetic fields?
???**
DOH or OEM to check with Andy Salkin or Eric Kim

B. Homeless

- **There has been an increase in homeless population throughout Lower Manhattan after 9/11, especially in the South St. Seaport area? Is anyone doing outreach w this population? Call the NYC Dept .of Homeless Services, now located at 33 Beaver St., NYC. Telephone No., (212) 361-8000. Or call the Emergency Assistance Hotline: 1-800-994-6494.**