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CHANGE

EPA Agrees To Test, Clean Up Manhattan Homes That Are Potentially Contaminated by WTC Fallout

After stating for months that the cleanup of building interiors in lower Manhattan was the responsibility of the landlords and tenants, EPA has agreed to test and clean up apartments potentially contaminated by dust from the collapse of the World Trade Center.

Although agency officials state that scientific data about any immediate health risks from indoor air is reassuring, "people should not have to live with uncertainty about their futures."

"We understand the concerns of Lower Manhattan residents and we know that they are looking to us for reassurance," said Jane M. Kenny, EPA Region 2 administrator.

The plan covers residential units south of Canal Street and the Manhattan Bridge approach, river to river — an estimated 15,000 apartments in the vicinity of Ground Zero — and was developed by the multi-agency Task Force on Indoor Air in Lower Manhattan.

Environmentalists and tenants have been concerned that residents could be inhaling asbestos or other contaminants in the dust. Tenants have complained about building owners and residents being left to their own devices in interpreting confusing and often conflicting standards of environmental safety, resulting in the quality of the environmental cleanup in residential buildings varying drastically.

Under the plan, announced May 8, EPA, New York State, New York City, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and OSHA are taking a collaborative approach that will include the:

- Cleanups of residential units on request, using certified contractors, with follow-up testing for asbestos in the indoor air.
- Testing-only for asbestos in the indoor air for requesting households.
- Establishment of a hotline to take cleanup and testing requests.
- Availability of HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter vacuums.
- Distribution of health and cleanup information.
- Professional cleanups of remaining unoccupied, uncleaned buildings.

Under the plan, FEMA will provide funds to hire certified cleanup contractors for residents who wish to have their homes professionally cleaned. EPA will conduct follow-up testing for asbestos in the indoor air after the cleanups are completed. Upon request, the agency will provide the option of testing-only for residents who do not want their apartments cleaned. New York State will continue to provide HEPA vacuums through FEMA to residents who wish

Waste Week
5.20.02
Page 1 of 2

NYC-WTC_000143017

NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

EPA.....

to do their own cleaning on an ongoing basis. Requests for testing or cleaning will be taken through an EPA hotline that will be set up within several weeks.

"FEMA strongly supports the EPA and New York City's efforts to take immediate action aimed at alleviating concerns over environmental conditions in Lower Manhattan," said Joseph F. Picciano, acting regional director of the FEMA Region, "We are pleased to be able to fully fund this initiative."

EPA will collect samples of some pollutants associated with the collapse of the World Trade Center in apartments that have not been impacted. The agency will use the data to determine pre-existing or "background" levels in interior spaces in New York City. The Agency is also preparing to test various cleanup techniques in a still-unoccupied building near the World Trade Center site to confirm their effectiveness. EPA will provide health and cleanup information to all residents through the hotline and on the agency Web site (www.epa.gov/wtc).

Also under the plan, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection will supervise the cleaning of a small group of heavily impacted buildings that have remained unoccupied since September 11. Some of these buildings have not been cleaned thoroughly; most have not been cleaned at all. Worker safety during this cleanup will be coordinated with OSHA. In addition, DEP has begun contacting building owners to initiate the cleanup of residual debris on rooftops and building facades in Lower Manhattan. Finally, the city is developing a database of the results of samples taken indoors and outdoors by federal, state and local agencies as well as building owners and contractors.

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