

We are providing support on health and safety issues to the Mayor's Lower Manhattan Air Quality Task Force, which is led by the Office of Emergency Management and comprises not only City but also State and federal agencies; and to the Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality Task Force. These Task Forces are undertaking extensive outreach to assist the lower Manhattan community. The City Task Force's Hotline, begun on March 11, fields public concerns and answers inquiries concerning indoor and outdoor air quality.

The City Task Force has begun collecting information on every residential and commercial building south of Canal Street, and this information will be available in a comprehensive, publicly-accessible database. The database will include building characteristics (such as building age, type of HVAC system, and whether any structural damage occurred on September 11); all indoor and outdoor test results; and information on cleaning that has occurred since September 11. While we do not yet have an anticipated completion date for this effort, preliminary qualitative information on a limited number of buildings is currently available through the City's Lower Manhattan Air Quality Hotline, (212) 221-8635. The database will include all available quantitative information, and similar information will be collected for all parks in lower Manhattan. In addition to serving as a data clearinghouse, the database will help inform continuing clean-up efforts and estimates of personal exposure for any future epidemiologic study.

We continue to review the numerous air quality, debris sample, and personal monitoring tests conducted by various agencies. The data from air quality tests thus far continues to be, in general, reassuring. None of the testing done to date has shown results that would indicate long-term health impacts. For example, in outdoor air sampling, levels of asbestos -- a World Trade Center building component -- have been low and within standards except for a few transient spikes.

Last November and December, the Department of Health, in collaboration with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), and with assistance from the Environmental Protection Agency, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection and the New York State Department of Health, conducted an environmental sampling project in 30 buildings in lower Manhattan, and four buildings north of 59th Street for comparison purposes. The substances analyzed were building components that could have short- or long-term health effects, specifically asbestos, fibrous glass (or fiberglass), silica, mica, calcite and gypsum. Asbestos and fiberglass in particular can pose problems if airborne. Asbestos levels, if elevated over long periods of time, can cause health problems in the future. Airborne fiberglass can cause coughing, and skin, throat and eye irritation.