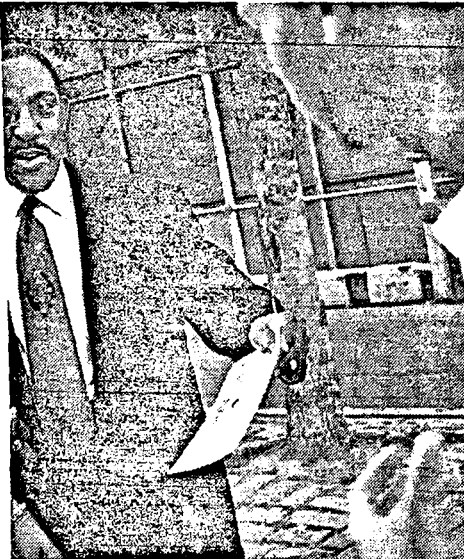


METRO WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 7, 2002

C I T Y



Justin Lane for The New York Times

ian Jr. handed out fliers yesterday at a Parkway. His challenger, Sandra Roper, preme Court building in Brooklyn.



U.S. to Test for Contaminants In 250 Downtown Apartments

By BARBARA STEWART

The federal Environmental Protection Agency announced plans yesterday to test for dioxins and toxic metals in a sampling of Lower Manhattan apartments whose interiors were coated with ash and dust from the World Trade Center's collapse.

The agency said the testing, along with the asbestos cleanup and testing program announced in May, will be the largest cleanup in its history.

"We've talked to scientists and experts and doctors and community groups and tenants' groups," an agency official said. "We feel — and scientists agree — that we need to act now and not spend months or years studying the situation."

The agency plans to test 250 apartments for dioxins and toxic metals like lead and mercury. Those apartments will be randomly chosen from the approximately 3,600 apartments whose residents have requested asbestos cleaning and testing. An additional 1,000 apartments will be tested for asbestos at the residents' request and cleaned only if their levels exceed federal standards.

The agency said that if tests indicated unacceptably high levels of dioxins and toxic metals, the apartments would be cleaned and an expansion of tests and cleanups would be considered. The cost of a laboratory analysis of dioxins is three times that of an asbestos analysis.

All testing and cleaning should be-

gin in September, the agency said. All residents south of Canal and Pike Streets in Lower Manhattan are eligible, as are landlords who want their buildings' common areas — lobbies, halls and corridors — cleaned and tested. The E.P.A. is accepting requests until Sept. 3.

The E.P.A.'s May announcement of an asbestos cleanup program was an abrupt reversal of the federal government's earlier stance that cleanups of private indoor spaces were the responsibility of residents and landlords. Tenants' groups and politicians had demanded that the E.P.A. and other federal agencies take on the job. But now that it has, only a relatively few residents in the approximately 20,000 eligible apartments have asked for the work.

The reasons for refusing run the "whole gamut," the agency official said. "Some say, 'It's very clean, I know it is,'" she said. "Others don't trust the government to be inside their homes."

The agency says ordinary home cleaning cannot remove asbestos, toxic metals or dioxins. Specialized cleaning agents and vacuums are required. Crevices or wider areas with thick coatings of dust will be isolated with plastic shields and samples taken for testing. Particularly dusty apartments will be cordoned off and the residents moved out until the cleaning is completed. Afterward, the air will be tested.

9/11 CLEANUP

Help's out there, but who knew?

By LUCY KOMISAR

A federal-state program to protect people who live in the city from asbestos by reimbursing them for air purifiers, vacuums and air conditioners is so hush-hush that most people don't know about it. As a result, though 3 million New York City households are eligible to get up to \$1,600, only about 1% — 31,000 — have applied.

The subsidies are part of the post-9/11 cleanup to eliminate asbestos that might be nestling in household dust or sucked into air conditioners. State Labor Department officials administering the grants have sponsored no public information campaign about them.

Officials give conflicting answers about whether approval is needed to purchase items. Brian Sogol of the office of state Sen. Thomas Duane (D-Manhattan) learned that an Individual and Family Grant helpline is always busy because of lack of staff.

New Yorkers, who may risk asbestos poisoning, have a right to know about these grants.

Environmental Protection Agency spokeswoman Mary Mears explained, "When the Trade Centers collapsed, tremendous dust was produced. We took street samples, and about a third contained asbestos. We feel the prudent thing is to get rid of as much of this dust as possible to reduce potential risk."

High-efficiency particle arresting — HEPA — vacuum cleaners filter out dust and asbestos. They remove 99.97% of harmful particles, including dust mites, mold spores, pet dander, allergens and even anthrax spores.

Should one worry 10 months after the event?

"If you have asbestos in your home, it can get kicked up. It's the buildup over long periods that counts," Mears said. "The risk is low, but if it's a simple matter of getting rid of the dust, let's get rid of the dust."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the state will reimburse households in the city up to \$500 for HEPA air purifiers, \$300 for extra filters, \$300 for the vacuums and \$500 for replacing or repairing air conditioners affected by dust or debris or damaged in the attack on the twin towers.

Special arrangements may be made for people lacking funds up front. Three-quarters of the subsidy comes from the \$21.5 billion federal 9/11 disaster aid package, the rest from the state.

To apply, call FEMA at (800) 462-9029 through September. For information, see www.fema.gov. The grant helpline is (866) 346-0348. Also, turn in old air conditioners by Sept. 20 for a \$75 bounty if the new model meets high-efficiency standards. Call (877) 697-6278 or log on to www.getenergysmart.org for information.

You'd think New Yorkers would be signing up in droves. They would if the state only told them about it.

Komisar is a New York journalist whose windows face the World Trade Center site.

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DAILY NEWS

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