

THE ISLAND

EPA outlines residential cleanup plans for lower Manhattan

■ **Government agencies have downplayed any health risk from the dust in the area**

By SHANNON McCAFFREY
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Almost one year after the World Trade Center collapse coated much of lower Manhattan in asbestos-laced dust and debris, federal environmental officials yesterday detailed plans to clean and test up to 38,000 residences.

Environmental Protection Agency officials said they agreed to the unprecedented indoor cleanup for any downtown resident who wants it mostly to calm lingering fears. The EPA and other government agencies have downplayed any health risk from the dust, saying tests have shown the asbestos did not reach hazardous levels.

But critics have complained that the EPA has taken too long to initiate the cleanup and that residents and others have already been exposed to the asbestos for 11 months. They attacked the plan yesterday as inadequate.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., called it "late in coming."

"Many questions about the pro-

cess still remain unanswered," she said.

Samples of the dust that settled after the trade center collapse Sept. 11 show varying amounts of asbestos, fiberglass and caustic concrete powder.

EPA officials yesterday would not place a price tag on the cleanup effort, which will be free for residents, because they do not know how many residents will take advantage of it.

But industry officials said professional asbestos abatement could cost an average of \$4,000 per apartment.

The EPA provided its plan yesterday to New York City officials who will review it and put contracts for the work out to bid.

Eight contractors will perform the work, which could begin as soon as next month and last about one year.

Under the EPA plan, a crew would enter a residence and determine which level of cleanup is appropriate given the amount of dust and other debris.

Once the cleanup is complete, the resident could determine how aggressive the follow-up testing should be. Those residents who seek the most aggressive asbestos testing — in which a 1-horsepower leaf blower will stir up any remaining dust — must leave their apartments for 48 hours. Housing assistance will be available

through the Red Cross.

Residents and environmental advocates have pushed for testing to be conducted before the cleanup as well as afterward, worried about the accuracy of a visual inspection alone. There have also been concerns of cross-contamination in buildings in which some apartment residents chose to undergo cleanups and others do not.

Building common areas and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems can be cleaned if building owners or managers request it under the EPA plan.

Dr. Marjorie Clark, of the 911 Environmental Action Group, called the plan "a crime."

"They're being very simplistic about this and not basing it on science," she said.

She complained the plan failed to test for other toxins like PCBs and mercury.

Hundreds of workers have reported respiratory ailments and other problems after cleaning dust-laden offices and apartments soon after Sept. 11. Those laborers face a slightly elevated risk of asbestos-related cancer in coming decades, scientists said.

The cleanup is available to those who live south of Canal, Allen and Pike streets. Businesses are not eligible for the federal cleanup.