

AIR QUALITY

Expert Says Asbestos Slightly Raised Risks for

By KIRK JOHNSON

The risk of asbestos-related disease, including cancer, has risen slightly for tens of thousands of people in Lower Manhattan as a result of the collapse of the World Trade Center, a prominent New York physician said yesterday.

The risk is higher, he said, for those who worked under the most hazardous conditions, and much of the danger could have been reduced or eliminated entirely if proper preventive action had been taken.

But the physician, Dr. Stephen M. Levin, the medical director at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine's Irving J. Selikoff Center for Occupational Health and Environmental Medicine, which has treated more patients for trade center-related respiratory complaints than perhaps any other hospital, also had some re-

assuring news.

In a presentation in Manhattan before a panel of the American College of Preventive Medicine, Dr. Levin said that for the vast majority of people exposed to asbestos — from being caught in the dust cloud of the collapsing towers, for example, or from cleaning up their apartments or offices — the risk of ever getting sick was “very, very small.”

He also said, after examining test results and cleanup records in some schools in Lower Manhattan, including Stuyvesant High School and Public School 150, that students and parents in those schools should have little concern about long-term health effects.

In general, he said, people who regularly walked by the disaster site on their way to or from work in the days and weeks afterward were exposed to lower asbestos levels, which

should not worry them.

“It’s important to keep this risk in perspective,” he said. “It’s not a zero increase in risk, but it’s not a magnitude of risk that I think people ought to be terrorized by or fearful of on a day-to-day basis.”

Asbestos, a fibrous mineral that was used for decades in the insulation of buildings, including parts of the twin towers, was not the only material that people were exposed to after the Sept. 11 attack. The billowing dust cloud contained pulverized concrete, fiberglass and other materials. Acrid smoke from the fires that burned for more than three months at the site irritated the lungs and sinuses of thousands.

But it is asbestos, perhaps because of the broader public awareness of its risks and the fear its name evokes, that has dominated the debate about the medical and environ-

Disease Among Residents of Lower Manhattan

mental consequences of the attack. Scientists have weighed in on the risks presented by short asbestos fibers and long ones. Some residents and workers have said that they believed there were cover-up conspiracies, perpetrated by the city, the federal government or building owners, to minimize cleanup costs and liabilities.

Dr. Levin’s presentation concluded that for most people, the added risks were slight, not because asbestos is less deadly than believed, but because most people did not get the level of exposure that, statistically, has produced disease. One-time exposure that results in cancer many years later is extremely rare, he said, and the scarring of the lungs that characterizes diseases like asbestosis generally requires years of exposure.

The catastrophic collapse of the

towers smashed much of the asbestos in the buildings into tiny fibers, which have been shown in animal tests to be generally less dangerous than longer fibers. (Short fibers, however, have been linked in some studies to a relatively rare cancer called mesothelioma that affects about one in a million people in the general population, Dr. Levin said.)

But the risks from asbestos exposure were also compounded for many people, including rescue and cleanup workers, who did not wear respirators sufficient to protect their lungs at ground zero and nearby. Many day laborers, including large numbers of immigrants who spoke little or no English, were hired to clean up dust-laden buildings, Dr. Levin said, with little or no protection or instruction.

“It’s a public health outrage that they were permitted to be exposed

this way,” he said.

Other public health experts said that Dr. Levin’s presentation reinforced their assessment that the long-term health consequences of the attacks were not likely to be severe for the general population.

“My assessment hasn’t changed,” said Patrick L. Kinney, an associate professor of public health at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. “The main health concern was workers around the pile,” he said.

But Professor Kinney added that there had been health effects that were not life-threatening, including new cases of asthma and sinusitis in people who were exposed to the dust.

“Beyond that, I’m not aware of any data that has suggested that people off-site have suffered any important health consequences,” he said.

New York Times 4/26/02



EPA vows housing cleanup

By GREG GITTRICH
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Bowing to angry tenants and homeowners near Ground Zero, the Environmental Protection Agency said yesterday it would test and clean apartments potentially tainted with asbestos from the destruction of the World Trade Center.

The federal agency's decision to clean as many as 15,000 apartments south of Canal St. represents a dramatic flip-flop in policy.

The agency had argued that landlords and homeowners were responsible for the task.

Despite the about-face, the EPA and city environmental officials maintained yesterday that no health emergency exists. They said the sweeping new program is being carried out largely to ease fears of those who live near Ground Zero.

"While the scientific data about any immediate health risks from indoor air is very reassuring, people should not have to live with uncertainty

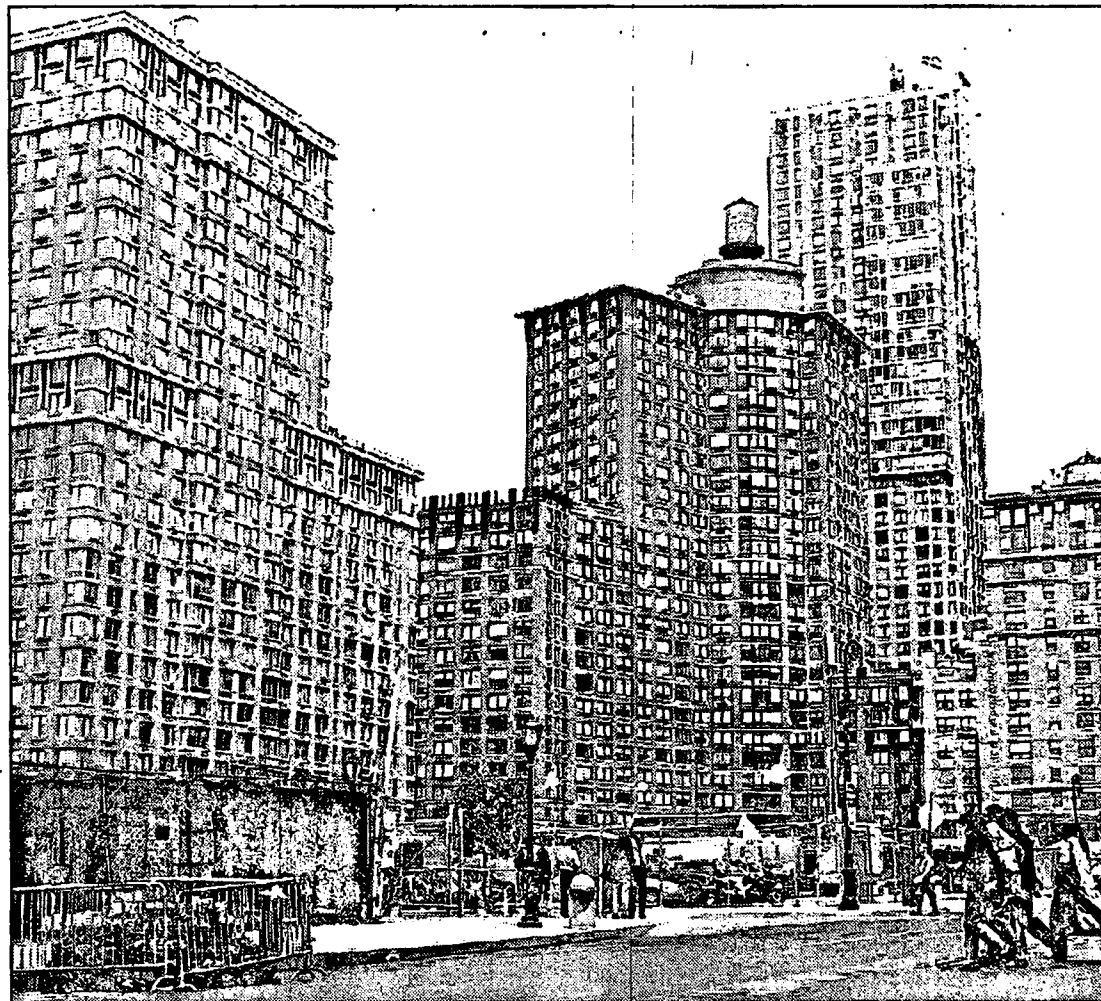
about their futures," said Jane Kenny, EPA regional administrator. "There is no emergency here."

However, at the same news conference, Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-Manhattan) said, "Lots of scientific data supports that there are real problems."

'Going to deal with it'

"The important thing is we are going to deal with it now," said Nadler, who had battled, along with Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), to force the EPA to clean homes near the disaster site.

By June 1, people concerned that their homes are tainted with asbestos will be able to call a hotline and get city-certified



THOMAS MONASTER DAILY NEWS

CLEANUP TARGET

Approximately 15,000 apartments south of Canal St., including buildings near North End Ave., will be cleaned and tested for asbestos by the Environmental Protection Agency.

contractors to test and clean their apartments.

Testing will be conducted after — not before — an apartment is cleaned. Officials said the cleaning should remove other contaminants, such as lead and mercury, released into the air when the towers collapsed after they were attacked by terror-

ists Sept 11. But the program will test only for asbestos.

Nadler argued that the cleaning should be done building by building — not unit by unit — to avoid "a threat of recontamination."

Inhaling asbestos can cause chronic lung disease and cancer. The fiber was used as fire-

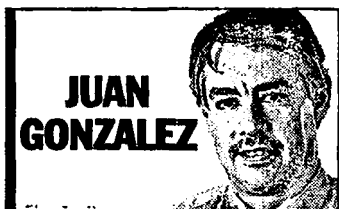
proofing in at least 37 floors of the south tower.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is picking up the tab for the program, which does not include nonresidential spaces such as schools.

Professional cleaning costs about \$1.50 per square foot. But the tab can quadruple if asbestos is detected.

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The New York Times, 5/9/02NY Times 5/9/02 -

E.P.A. May Expand Plan To Clean Apartments

By KIRK JOHNSON

Federal officials said yesterday that the government's new commitment to clean any apartment south of Canal Street in Manhattan, to remove dust and debris from the World Trade Center disaster, might be expanded to include reimbursement for residents who have already had their homes professionally cleaned.

They also said the cleanup program, which was officially announced yesterday at a news conference at the Manhattan regional headquarters of the Environmental Protection Agency, could be extended to include apartments outside the boundaries if testing suggests the need for it. Depending on what is found in the residential work, the interiors of businesses may eventually be included as well, they said.

"No one should have to live with anxiety about the safety of the air in their own homes," said Jane Kenny, the E.P.A.'s regional administrator.

The cleanup program, which is expected to begin next month, reverses the position that was taken after Sept. 11 by federal, local and state government officials, who insisted that Lower Manhattan residents and business owners were responsible for cleaning their own spaces.

Under the new policy, the federal government has committed money to the cleanup, apparently without limit. "The most important message is that FEMA, our federal partner, has not said this is all there is," said Christopher O. Ward, the city's commissioner of environmental protection, referring to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which will pay for the work.

E.P.A. officials said that according to their initial estimates, 15,000 apartments will be covered by the plan, and that cleanup by a contractor for a typical two-bedroom apartment might cost \$3,000 to \$5,000. If every resident participates and each apartment is within that range, that would bring the cost to \$45 million to \$75 million, not including the possible expansion and reimbursement plans mentioned yesterday.

At the news conference, Ms. Kenny and other city and federal officials strongly rejected any suggestion that waiting eight months after the disaster to begin a cleaning program for New York's interior spaces has put residents at risk. The collapse of the trade center towers blasted dust and ash, some of which contained asbestos or other potentially harmful materials, across a wide area of the city, including parts of Brooklyn.

In fact, Mr. Ward said, the new cleanup program could validate what health and environmental officials have said all along: that most apartment interiors were not contaminated.

The degree of participation will probably depend on whether inviting government apartment cleaners into one's home sounds reassuring or intrusive. The cleanups could take two to three days, officials said. The E.P.A. will set up a telephone number for the program by the end of the month, officials said.

Representative Jerrold Nadler, a Manhattan Democrat who also spoke at the news conference, said he would work to see that apartments were cleaned en masse, with every resident participating so that no dust or debris is left over to be tracked back into cleaned spaces.