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From: Ippolito, David
Sent: Friday, March 29, 2002 7:40 AM
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Subject: FW: Westchester County Journal

FYI

-----Original Message-----

From: Peist, Phillip
Sent: Friday, March 29, 2002 7:10 AM
To: Clark, Patricia-K. (New York); Desiervi, Anthony; Gillen, Gil; Dugan, Kathleen; Kenny, Laura; Kulick, Robert D.; Mendelson, Richard; Plotch, Sandy; Zoldan, Efraim; Caldarelli, John; DeLeys, Gordon; Cortez, Diana E; Jerome, Edward; Baxter, Greg; Kaplan, Steve; Brennan, Kevin; OSHA Desk; Rastelli, Arthur; Ricca, Louis; Deitch, Norman; Moynihan-Fradkin, Maureen; Mannheim, Philip; Marrinan, Eric; Magee, Robert; Adams, Chris (Syracuse); Adams, David; Cherasard, Paul; Frye, Ronald; Garvey, Robert; Gee, Kay; Hoffman, Kris; Ippolito, David; Levy, Mike
Cc: 'wtc-opa@osha.gov'
Subject: Westchester County Journal news article with a Pat Clark quote

Air quality worries those living near WTC site

By ROGER WITHERSPOON

THE JOURNAL NEWS

(Original publication: March 29, 2002)

More than six months after the destruction of the World Trade Center complex, thousands of residents of lower Manhattan still don't know whether their homes are free of contaminated air.

The responsibility for testing air for toxic particles that can cause long-term illnesses, or cleaning potentially cancer-causing compounds like asbestos — which usually requires special handling — has largely been left to tenants and landlords.

"There has been no comprehensive testing of the air or dust in any of the residential buildings, and they easily have 30,000 to 40,000 tenants," said Sudhir Jain, president of the Lower Manhattan Tenants Coalition. "They need to go through each building, apartment by apartment, and test for mercury, lead, dioxins, asbestos, and everything else that was in the dust. The government needs to do whatever is necessary to clean it up."

The coalition has asked the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. to spend \$15 million to test nearly 7,000 apartments for contamination. But city, state and federal officials have not yet decided if they need to do more than advise residents on how to take care of themselves.

"We have no idea what the air quality is," said Nancy Rosing, 64, of Battery Park City. "We all had sore throats and headaches for a couple of months."

Rosing said she remained concerned about the dust from barges where debris is being dumped for removal, and that streets continued to be watered.

"When you go by there, your lungs just seem to know they shouldn't be breathing quite so deeply," she said. "When there's a drought and they keep watering the streets, then you know they know something we don't know. What's in the dust? They've had construction here for years and never watered down the streets."

Most city residents interviewed in the neighborhood last week, however, said they were no longer concerned about contaminated air.

"I think that it was really bad when they were saying it wasn't, but now the problem is gone," said Roger Newton, 40, who lives in SoHo.

The Sept. 11 destruction of the Twin Towers was an unprecedented environmental disaster, generating more than 3 billion pounds of broken glass, concrete dust, twisted steel and pulverized furnishings. The fires that burned for months at the site released dangerous amounts of the myriad compounds that make up such a massive development.

Since then, rescue workers, residents, government agencies and environmental groups have been debating and offering conflicting accounts of the relative safety of the air in the immediate area.

New York City's official position is that there is no danger of contaminated air, but it does not monitor dust or air in apartment buildings, many of which were heavily damaged in the aftershocks of the Twin Towers' collapse.

"We feel the air quality is no worse than it was Sept. 10," said David Longshore, a spokesman for the city's Office of Emergency Management. "When you look at

the amount of particulates and other things that would be present in the air, there is nothing there now that wasn't there Sept. 10."

The Environmental Protection Agency has monitored the air in and around Ground Zero, but is not responsible for indoor air quality. An agency spokeswoman echoed Longshore's comments that air quality has largely returned to its pre-Sept. 11 state. Still, the EPA hasn't decided if it will get involved with checking air or dust contamination in residential buildings.

"Certainly, some of the issues are whether more cleanup work needs to be done," EPA spokeswoman Mary Mears said. "Sampling and cleaning are things that are on the table, but we haven't made those decisions yet."

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which sets workplace air contamination standards, has examined 21 office buildings in the vicinity of Ground Zero and found contaminated dust inside, but few contaminants in recent air readings. The agency also has monitored the cleanup at 34 buildings around Ground Zero to ensure that contractors complied with federal standards for the removal of toxic substances.

"Our focus has been looking at levels of contaminants around the site of the World Trade Center," said Pat Clark, OSHA's regional administrator. "There is a risk from dust that has not been cleaned up. We aren't saying there is no risk left, but the air quality has gone back to what it was before Sept. 11. Unfortunately, we do have urban air pollution, and this is not a pristine area."

Brian Buckley, executive director of the Environmental Occupational Health Science Institute at Rutgers University in New Jersey, said his organization analyzed the dust produced by the terrorist attack. He said the study completed in January showed that there were dangers posed by toxic chemicals and other harmless substances that were now small enough to be inhaled.

"We found a lot of glass fibers, not just from asbestos, but from the windows," Buckley said. "This was very similar to volcanic ash."

Buckley said the problem with the glass was that it was small enough to be inhaled and stay in the lungs. In addition, he said, the dust had an acid level approaching drain cleaner, "and that's a definite irritant if you bring it into your lungs."

The effect of these irritants surfaced quickly among the hundreds of rescue workers at Ground Zero. David Billing, a spokesman for the Fire Department of New York City, said there were currently 196 firefighters on medical leave and 219 on light duty, a direct result of their work at the World Trade Center site. Most of those firefighters, he said, suffer from respiratory injuries.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, in one of his recent weekly radio addresses, said compensation claims will exceed \$7 billion from the more than 1,300 firefighters and other Ground Zero rescue workers suffering from respiratory illnesses. The actual payout will be far less, he said.

One reason for the difficulty in determining the area's overall air quality is the lack of consistency to the pattern in which dust spread from the site, and the amount of toxic material in any given pile of dust. Buckley said the Rutgers study found asbestos deposits ranging from just under the federal limit of one fiber per each cubic centimeter of air to three times that amount.

"The danger from fibers," Buckley said, "is that this stuff is the right size and shape to enter the lungs and not leave. One strand of asbestos in a (cubic centimeter) of air is not a problem. But how many CCs do you breathe in a day? When you add it up, breathing contaminated air becomes a serious problem because asbestos has a cumulative effect."

The dust also had varying amounts of toxic metals, such as mercury and lead, and chemicals such as PCBs and dioxin.

The EPA provided several high-powered vacuums to remove mounds of dust from streets around Ground Zero, and worked with OSHA and the city Department of Health to hose the outside of many office buildings in the area. The New York City Board of Education is responsible for testing air and dust in the eight schools near Ground Zero and so far has spent about \$5 million to clean the schools in compliance with OSHA and EPA standards, board spokeswoman Catie Marshall said.

The board also maintains an air-quality team in each school to take air samples 100 times each school day.

But no agency has checked the air quality in residences in the area, tenants and some elected officials said.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, in a Feb. 28 letter to EPA Administrator Christie Whitman, said the agency should spearhead a task force to deal with the problem facing the residents.

Clinton's efforts resulted in the formation this month of two task forces on indoor air quality, one run by the city's Office of Emergency Management and a second by the EPA.

Among the first actions to be taken by the groups was the announcement last week that dozens of contract workers would spend about two months cleaning buildings surrounding the site that are caked with potentially harmful solid debris. The debris poses no immediate health threat, but city testers found possibly

dangerous levels of asbestos on about half of the buildings they examined, officials said. Over time, the debris could turn into dust, which could blow into homes and businesses.

The EPA also will begin cleaning and testing dust and air samples in a residential building near Ground Zero that has not yet reopened.

Mears, the EPA spokeswoman, said the agency would assess the cleaning techniques and determine the most effective ways to clean contaminated apartments. A decision would then be made if tenants and local contractors should clean residential buildings, or if the EPA should assume that role.

"I certainly understand people's concern," said Jane Kenny, the EPA's regional administrator. "There is so much confusion, and everyone is trying to recover from the most cataclysmic event that ever happened in this country. The goal is that people will have confidence that their homes and businesses are safe. We will determine what is the absolute best thing for the people in lower Manhattan and we will do it."

Send e-mail to [Roger Witherspoon](#)

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