

**Mayor's Office of Environmental Coordination
New York City Department of Health
New York City Department of Environmental Protection
Responds to the World Trade Center Disaster**

FACT SHEET FOR CLEANING HOMES

Revised 02/6/02 -----DRAFT

The collapse of the World Trade Center (WTC) caused a large amount of dust, soot, ash, and other building materials to enter into some buildings and homes in the surrounding area. Because cleanup work continues at the site, dust can still be a concern for some residents, making regular and frequent cleaning important for the safe occupancy of buildings in the lower Manhattan area. Dust can irritate your eyes, nose and throat. Dust can also cause coughing, shortness of breath and wheezing in some people. The following information provides guidance to tenants and building owners on cleaning responsibilities and procedures.

Building Owner Responsibilities

In September, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Health (DOH) advised building owners regarding building maintenance and re-occupancy issues. The steps to be taken prior to re-occupying buildings included the cleaning of air circulation systems and water tanks as well as assessing building contamination for possible hazardous components, including asbestos. Building owners are responsible for the cleaning of building exteriors, including rooftops, grounds, and common indoor areas as well as the provision of general building services (e.g. heat, water, electric, gas, etc.). Due to changing conditions and continued activity at the WTC site, building owners should periodically assess the condition of building exteriors and air conditioning systems for cleanliness and may have to periodically re-clean areas. Proper methods for cleaning should be followed.

The DEP has determined that minimal dust accumulations (a light coating) can be cleaned using wet methods and/or vacuuming equipped with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters. The use of wet cleaning methods and HEPA vacuuming described in this fact sheet will greatly minimize a person's risk of exposure. The DEP should be contacted for indoor or outdoor dust accumulations greater than a minimal amount and/or where concerns about asbestos exist.

The DOH urges building owners to discuss building-related cleaning concerns with tenants. Building owners should provide residents with information concerning the steps that have been taken to ensure that the appropriate actions have been performed, including the results of any testing performed and the nature and extent of cleaning performed.

Tenant Responsibilities

Many aspects of the general advisements issued in September also apply to tenants. Tenants are

responsible for cleaning their own interior living spaces, including terraces, once any general and common building concerns which may interfere with interior living space cleanup have been addressed by the owner. The guidelines below will provide additional information regarding regular cleaning. In the event that you do not have access to HEPA vacuums for cleaning, the use of wet cleaning methods alone will also be effective in removing accumulations of dust. Frequent cleaning may be necessary to control accumulations of dust. The use of personal HEPA air cleaning devices in the living area may be effective in reducing the amount of particulate matter circulating in the air. A HEPA air cleaning device which also contains charcoal or carbon filters may be effective in the partial removal of minor, nuisance level odors.

Building Owners and Tenants

Tenants and building owners should exchange information and discuss the satisfactory resolution of building-related cleaning concerns. City agencies will respond to any additional or continuing concerns or questions you may have, however, the minimum actions outlined here are essential for the safe occupancy of buildings in the lower Manhattan area. City agency contact information is listed below.

Routine Cleaning Procedures in Homes

The following are recommendations for routine cleaning of minimal dust accumulation or a light coating of dust:

- Proper dust cleanup will prevent settled dust from being reintroduced into the air. The best way to remove dust from surfaces is to use a wet/damp cloth or wet/damp mop. Sweeping the dust dry may cause it to get in the air you breathe. More detailed cleaning procedures are listed below.
- Because some materials in the dust can be irritating to the skin, rubber gloves may be worn to reduce skin irritation.
- Some people have reported irritation from dust in the air when they clean. You can use a dust mask to further protect yourself from breathing dust while cleaning. The dust can cause irritation of your nose, throat and lungs. An N-95 type dust mask is recommended for use during routine cleaning. These masks can be found at most local hardware and home improvement stores.
- Use a high efficiency particulate air vacuum cleaner (HEPA) to clean dust from carpets, upholstery, and other materials that cannot be cleaned by wet wiping. A regular (standard) vacuum cleaner bag and filter is not recommended because it will blow dust from the floor into the air. If you do not have a HEPA vacuum, ask your building management company if they have a HEPA vacuum you can use. HEPA vacuums are available at most retail stores. In addition, Safe Horizons can provide some assistance with cleaning items for homes south of Canal Street. For more information contact them at 1-866-689-4357.
- Floors or surfaces with light dust accumulation can be cleaned by wet mopping/wiping. Wash water used for cleaning should be disposed of in the sink or toilet. Cloths and mops can be reused or disposed of after use. If reused, dirty mop heads and cleaning cloths should be washed separately from regular laundry. Wash mops and cloths after each use. Handling dry dirty cloths/mops can reintroduce dust in the air.
- Floors or surfaces with a light visible dust accumulation can be HEPA vacuumed first then wet wiped/mopped using the procedure stated above. This step can help reduce the

amount of dust stirred up.

- If cleaning cloths/mops are not reused, place used items in plastic bags while wet then dispose in your trash.
- Surfaces that cannot be cleaned by wet cleaning methods can be cleaned by HEPA vacuuming.
- Outdoor surfaces with small accumulations of dust can be cleaned by HEPA vacuuming or by wet mopping/wiping if the surface type allows. When cleaning outdoor areas such as terraces precautions should be taken to prevent dust and other materials from falling to the sidewalk or properties below.
- Dust from outdoors can be carried home on your shoes and should be removed before going inside. Shoes should also be wet wiped.
- Pets can track material inside. Wipe their feet with a damp cloth before they come inside.
- Clean more frequently than normal to minimize dust accumulation and dust levels in air.
- Dust can accumulate on your hands during cleaning. Wash your hands after cleaning, before eating, drinking, and before smoking.
- Contact lens wearers can consider removing their lenses while cleaning in order to avoid possible eye irritation.

Additional Ways To Improve Your Indoor Air Quality

- The use of HEPA air purifying devices in living areas can be an effective way of reducing the amount of dust circulating in the air. The HEPA air purifying units are sold in various sizes depending on room size and are available at local hardware and retail stores. In addition, some HEPA purifying units come equipped with charcoal or carbon filters that can remove minor, nuisance level odors.
- Additional information on the selection and purchase of residential air cleaning devices can be obtained from the Environmental Protection Agency's website at www.epa.gov/iaq/pub/residair.
- Consideration should be given to upgrading the filters for the buildings' air conditioning system. A professional heating and ventilation specialist can provide advice on upgrading the filtration system. An upgraded filter can greatly improve the air quality of the building.
- Air conditioning filters should be changed on a frequent basis to insure that clean air is provided to the building.
- Clean on regular basis to prevent dust buildup using the wet methods described previously.
- Seal around windows and outer openings to prevent the introduction of dust and fine particles into the home.

For further information, please refer to the agency websites or telephone contacts listed below.

For World Trade Center Health Concerns:

New York City Department of Health

www.nyc.gov/health

(212) 213-1844

For Asbestos, Noise, and Environmental Concerns:

New York City Department of Environmental Protection

www.nyc.gov/dep

(718) DEP-HELP

For psychological or emotional assistance:

Project Liberty

www.projectliberty.state.ny.us

[1-800-LIFENET](tel:1800LIFENET)