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ASBESTOS FACT SHEET

In an effort to assist the general public with questions concerning Asbestos, this fact is being issued by the New York City Department of Health (DOH), in conjunction with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), and other federal agencies.

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals mined for their insulation, friction, and fire resistant properties. They were used in over 3,000 different products to include: brake linings, asbestos cement pipe, building materials, and insulation. Most asbestos containing products have now been replaced by less toxic materials. However, due to the extensive use of asbestos, particularly in break linings and building products, asbestos fibers are still present in the soil, air, and indoor environments. The World Trade Center, which was constructed prior to the early 1970's, still contained asbestos containing materials.

Has Asbestos been detected?

Since asbestos was used in building the World Trade Center, City, State, and Federal agencies have been collecting dust, debris, and air samples since the collapse. Some asbestos was found in a few of the dust and debris samples taken from the blast site and individuals working in this area have been advised to take precautions.

However, most of the air samples taken have been below levels of concern. Based on the asbestos test results received thus far, there are no significant health risks to occupants in the affected area or to the general public.

What are the health effects of asbestos?

Asbestos exposure (which can cause asbestos-related lung disease) becomes a health concern when high concentrations of asbestos fibers are inhaled over a long period of time. Asbestos-related lung disease results only from intense asbestos exposure, primarily as a consequence of occupational exposures. Miners and other workers who inhaled high concentrations of the asbestos fibers later developed diseases such as lung cancer, mesothelioma (cancer of the thin membrane that surrounds the lung), and asbestosis (scarring of the lungs). *The risk of developing an asbestos-related illness following an exposure of short duration, even to high levels, is extremely low.*

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What are the federal guidelines regarding asbestos?

In the 1980's, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), enacted standards to protect children upon reentry to schools that had undergone asbestos removal operations. Scientists collected air samples in the schools through filters that capture the asbestos fibers so they can be counted with a microscope. The measurement of these fibers or "structures" must not exceed 70 per square millimeter of the filter paper before children are allowed inside. There are other federal standards developed for different circumstances, such as worker protection, that are less protective and are measured differently. However, to be as protective as possible of people living and working in the World Trade Center area and beyond, EPA is using the school re-entry standard. Levels above 70 asbestos structures per square millimeter do not imply an immediate health threat. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has collected data and is evaluating these against a variety of established standards and guidelines for the various pollutants it is monitoring from the air, water and dust in and around the World Trade Center (WTC) disaster site.

Comparisons to these standards are done to protect public health. EPA considers the amount of time a person is exposed to the pollutant and the location, such as a school, workplace or home in setting these standards.

For additional information, please visit the New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) web site at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/home.html>

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