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Early Test Results Show Asbestos-Free Apartments

Preliminary results from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) indoor cleanup program reveal that for the majority of Lower Manhattan apartments cleaned and tested by the agency thus far, very little asbestos contamination from World Trade Center dust has been found.

EPA officials announced that for 246 of 255 apartments cleaned and tested through October 17, all results for asbestos testing were below the EPA clearance level, and only three apartments tested showed any results above EPA clearance levels. The clearance level set by the EPA for asbestos is 0.0009 fibers per cubic centimeter. According to the agency's Web site, that means "if 10,000 people are exposed to this level of asbestos for 30 years, there may be one more case of cancer than if the group had not been exposed at all."

While encouraged by initial findings, EPA officials stress that testing is still in the very early stages. "What we have now are the results from a few hundred residences out of thousands," said Richard Stapleton, an EPA spokesperson. To date, only 255 apartments of almost 6,000 registered for the program have been cleaned and tested. Of those registered, 4,790 have requested cleaning and testing of their apartments, and another 1,146 have requested only testing.

The EPA has decided to make all results available to the public as soon as possible. "We are putting the data up so everyone can follow along with us as we learn," said Stapleton. The first test results were announced at a press conference on October 22, and aggregate test results will be updated weekly on the EPA website http://www.epa.gov/factsheets/clean_test_results.htm. Test results for individual residents will be provided only to residents of the affected units.

The testing process itself could continue to evolve as more apartments are tested and as more results become known. Surprisingly, the greatest challenge faced by the EPA so far in the indoor cleanup project has been scheduling the cleanup itself. "Given the outcry for assistance, we were prepared for a deluge of calls from residents saying, 'I want to be first,'" said Stapleton. Instead, contractors have struggled to set up testing for those who have requested it, finding people too busy to commit to appointment times. In some cases, contractors have arrived for scheduled cleanups only to find no one home. "It never occurred to us that we would be in the situation of having contractors sitting idle because they can't schedule appointments," said Stapleton. In an attempt to streamline the process, officials are developing new policies regarding scheduling and cancellation, and expect to post them on the EPA website <https://nyrpub.epa.gov/NYRDUST2/dustcleanup/form.html> by week's end.

Lower Manhattan residents who have yet to register for testing are strongly encouraged to do so. According to EPA estimates, the 6,000 registered apartments represent only about a quarter of more than 20,000 eligible residences within the testing area. For

residents south of Pike and Canal Streets who have not applied, requests will be accepted until December 28, 2002 via the EPA website <https://nyrpub.epa.gov/NYRDUST2/dustcleanup/form.html>, or by calling the EPA's WTC hotline at (877) 796-5471.

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