

Avaltroni, Robert

From: Grob, Shauna

Sent: Wednesday, May 08, 2002 9:32 AM

To: Avaltroni, Robert

Subject: The Commissioner's Press Statement re: Asbestos Abatement Program

Bob – Thanks for you help. Please review this draft. I am also asking Geoff Ryan and Charlie to review. Chris is reachable by fax until about 10:30 - 11, so I would love to be able to get this to him by then. Please call me with comments at ext. 3480.

Shauna



Asbestos

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Good afternoon. I am pleased to be here today with the EPA and our federal, state and city partners to announce the launch of a comprehensive program to allay the fears of Lower Manhattan residents concerned about possible asbestos contamination in their homes caused by the collapse of the World Trade Center. There are approximately 31,000 people living south of Canal Street, and none of them should have to live with fear of the air they breathe. We are gratified that FEMA and the EPA are providing emergency funding to allow residential dwellings to be tested for asbestos, and to properly clean any homes in which evidence of contamination is found. While our work to date has found minimal instances of asbestos in the buildings surrounding Ground Zero, we recognize that New Yorkers are concerned about the air quality in their homes, and we are confident that the measures announced today will help further reassure residents of Lower Manhattan of the safety of their living environment.

Immediately following the collapse of the Twin Towers, DEP coordinated cleanup activities of streets, sidewalks, and exterior common areas with OEM, EPA, DOS and NYC DOH. Since September 11th, we have established an air monitoring network in and around Ground Zero to evaluate the exterior air quality on a continuing basis; we expect to continue this close monitoring at least through June. Since January, DEP inspectors have been conducting an assessment of building exteriors of more than 800 buildings south of Canal Street to identify debris and dust from the World Trade Center on rooftops and facades and to conduct appropriate clean-ups as required. Where we have found exterior debris, it has formed into dense, cake-like deposits, meaning that it is not airborne and is not likely to be breathed in by local residents or visitors.

We have also been collecting indoor air samples from 300 building owners in Lower Manhattan; of 121,000 samples submitted to date, only 1% have required a professional clean-up. DEP has responded to owner requests and citizen complaints about dust and

debris in apartments with site visits to review interior and exterior conditions. To date, we have received 218 complaints regarding possible asbestos contamination in apartments; only one of these complaints has warranted a clean-up. We are confident that there is minimal reason for public concerns about the air in their homes. Regardless, we recognize that New Yorkers need to be assured that they are not being exposed to pollutants that might pose long-term health risks. Through the partnership of these agencies, we are pleased to be going forward with this program to offer testing of residential units south of Canal Street river-to-river, and to provide professional cleaning and follow-up testing free of charge in those cases where contaminants are identified.

The scientific data about immediate health risks from short-term exposure to asbestos is reassuring, and in the few cases where it has been found in homes, professional clean-up has been completed. Unfortunately, there are few existing standards for indoor air quality and sampling protocols are still rudimentary at this point, but we are working with experienced asbestos remediation contractors to test and analyze interior spaces as requested by the public, all the while continuing to develop accurate evaluation criteria. As we conduct the necessary background studies, we will keep the public informed about any new information that is valuable in the short-term. By offering testing and clean-ups to all Lower Manhattan residents while continuing to evaluate local interior and exterior air conditions, we aim to address the public's immediate concerns, while allowing us to ensure the long-term quality of air Downtown.

Many details of the program will be fleshed out in the weeks to come. The time frame for getting apartments cleaned will be determined by the number of people who request testing, but funding has been identified to clean all residential units, if necessary. DEP and the other local, state and federal agencies involved will make every effort to move

this process forward quickly and efficiently, offering the public peace of mind and ensuring the safety and health of Lower Manhattan residents.