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Remarks of Regional Administrator Jane Kenny

Announcement of Lower Manhattan Apartment Cleanup Plan

Wednesday, May 8, 2002

Good afternoon. We stand here just a few blocks away from Ground Zero ? a reminder that for the people of the agency I represent, along with so many residents of Lower Manhattan, September 11 was a very personal tragedy.

Indeed, while September 11 changed all our lives, this is especially true for those who work, go to school, and live in Lower Manhattan. And for many, the emotions we shared that day were compounded by the literal fallout from the World Trade Center disaster. The debris that shrouded Lower Manhattan made its way onto rooftops and ledges and into apartments and other indoor spaces.

While the scientific data about any immediate health risks from indoor air is reassuring, people should not have to live with uncertainty about their futures. Most residents had their homes cleaned, but many have ongoing concerns about the dust that may still lurk on their floors and window ledges. This cannot continue. No one should have to live with anxiety about the safety of the air in their own homes.

That is why I am joined here today by EPA's partners in federal, state and city government, who have been working together since September 11 and more recently on Governor Whitman's Task Force on Indoor Air. We understand the concerns of Lower Manhattan residents and we know that they are looking to us for reassurance. While we cannot undo the events of September 11, we can provide the assurance that people's homes have been cleaned properly. And we can do so by combining the expertise and resources of our partners.

I am pleased to announce a truly unprecedented effort to assist the people of Lower Manhattan. EPA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the city of New York are launching a comprehensive plan to ensure that all residential units from Canal Street south, river to river, have been properly cleaned.

At each resident's individual request, the city will use certified contractors to clean the apartment and then EPA will follow up by testing for asbestos in the indoor air. Residents who decide they do not want a cleanup can still request that EPA test for asbestos in the indoor air. Again, with the help of FEMA resources, this service will be available to every resident from Canal Street south. We will make every effort to set up a hotline by the end of the month to handle requests.

What's more, knowing that many residents will want to tackle the cleanups themselves, we will distribute detailed guidance and provide HEPA-filter vacuum cleaners to help them. The members of the Task Force are confident that the methods recommended for cleaning ? which include wet wiping, wet mopping, and HEPA-filter vacuuming ? are effective in minimizing long-term health risks. These methods will also reduce particulates and fiberglass and help bring relief to those who are especially sensitive to these irritants.

It's no exaggeration to say that this is a huge and unprecedented task. There are an estimated 15,000 apartments in Lower Manhattan, and so we will have to ask patience as we get our work started. But I can assure you that we will not consider our job complete until residents and the business community of Lower Manhattan have regained a sense of comfort in the place that they

call home. The people of this city who have suffered such a tremendous loss certainly deserve to have that peace of mind.

Before I introduce the next speaker, I want to thank everyone on the task force who worked so hard to develop this plan. In particular, I want to acknowledge the leadership of Acting Regional Director Joe Picciano of FEMA; Regional Administrator Patricia Clark of OSHA;

Commissioner Erin Crotty of New York State DEC; Ron Tramantano, Director of the Center for Environmental Health at the New York State Department of Health; Mayor Michael Bloomberg; Commissioner Chris Ward of New York City DEP; Commissioner Thomas Frieden of the New York City Department of Health; and John Odermatt, Commissioner of the New York City Office of Emergency Management.

I would also like to recognize the contributions of the many elected officials who have demonstrated their heartfelt concern for their constituents in Lower Manhattan ? Senators Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer, Representatives Jerrold Nadler and Nydia Velazquez, New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, and the other representatives of the Ground Zero Elected Officials Task Force.

Now I would like to ask Representative Jerrold Nadler to add his perspective on this truly unprecedented initiative.

After Nadler speaks:

Thank you, Congressman Nadler. Our next speaker is Acting Regional Director Joseph Picciano of FEMA.

After Picciano speaks:

Thank you, Joe. Now I would like to turn the podium over to Commissioner Christopher Ward of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection.

After Ward speaks:

Thank you, Chris. We would now be glad to take your questions.