

ASBESTOS IN DUST FROM THE COLLAPSE

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Tons of dust from the mangled World Trade Center towers contain cancer-causing asbestos — and federal officials want to use Superfund money to help clean it up.

Tests on debris from the wreckage show elevated levels of asbestos, federal Environmental Protection Agency spokesman Chris Paulitz said yesterday.

EPA chief Christie Todd Whitman called asbestos one of the major environmental hazards stemming from the tragedy.

"My main concern is that we continue to monitor dust in the air," Whitman said. "Right now, there's no immediate health threat to people outside the ground-zero area."

Samples taken by The Post at the disaster scene and analyzed by an independent, certified laboratory were found to contain 1.5 percent chrysotile asbestos. One percent or less is considered to be within the normal range.

Experts said the dust spewed by the collapsing skyscrapers rained down on parts of Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens.

Some of the deadly fibers — which are one-one-hundredth the diameter of a human hair — stayed airborne, and can remain so for months.

"It is dangerous," said Howard Bader, of H.A. Bader Consultants, an asbestos-removal firm.

While Whitman said only one sample in two dozen showed levels higher than 1 percent, Bader insisted, "Having less than 1 percent doesn't mean it's safe."

The higher-than-normal EPA sample, taken from a car near the attack site, registered 4.5 percent.

Some EPA workers spent yesterday hosing down areas heavily coated with chalky film left over from the disaster.

One of the more common diseases caused by exposure to asbestos is mesothelioma.

"Mesothelioma attacks the stomach and lung linings," Bader said. "High exposure is not required."

Bader said the airborne fibers are the most dangerous.

"Asbestos can travel miles in the wind," he said. "They are finding debris in Coney Island and Breezy Point."

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