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DOWNWIND FROM DISASTER

**Press Release #2
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In response to a Freedom of Information request, we obtained EPA's tests data on samples of the air, dust, and water run off taken between September 16 and October 16 from the World Trade Center area. While we found the data to be incomplete, we have enough information from this EPA source, from other studies, and from samples we personally had analyzed to comment on some of the contaminants and to make recommendations.

ASBESTOS DUST. Dusts containing one percent or more of asbestos must be treated as asbestos under the EPA and OSHA regulations. EPA's tests of dust in and around ground zero show asbestos levels ranging from a trace to 5 percent. The lack of uniformity in dust samples means that workers exposed to this dust should always use precautions consistent with asbestos work. Yet the front page of the October 22 New York Times showed workers on the pile either without respirators or with them hanging uselessly around their necks.

We believe this is in part due to EPA's press releases which have stressed that air sampling in New York and New Jersey showed very low levels of asbestos. EPA didn't make it clear that air tests are not relevant to those working at ground zero. These workers and workers cleaning up dust-contaminated buildings will be exposed to much higher levels of dust which are created by the work they do.

SULFUR DIOXIDE. The EPA data showed that sulfur dioxide gas in the air on a number of days in October when people were moving back into the area were at levels EPA calls "unhealthy for sensitive groups" (0.22 parts per million), "unhealthy" (0.3 ppm), or "very unhealthy" (0.6 ppm). There was even a spectacular 0.9 ppm reading which is considered outright "hazardous" under EPA Air Quality Indexes.

Sulfur dioxide is highly irritating and sensitizing. Under EPA's own guidelines, levels of sulfur dioxide as high as these trigger public announcements warning asthmatics and people with heart problems to stay indoors. Yet we did not hear EPA or the media warning people working or living in the areas near where these readings were obtained about this dangerous gas.

BENZENE & ORGANIC CHEMICALS. Toxic organic chemicals including benzene contribute to the distinctive odor of the smoke. EPA tests of the air at ground zero and of the smoke plume showed the presence of benzene and about 16 other organic chemicals. Benzene was found in amounts over the occupational (OSHA) limit of 1 ppm on several days.

Although concentrations of chemicals at a distance from the plume are expected to be much lower, people should have been told that the odor of the smoke is from these highly toxic chemicals. The EPA should explain that while the amounts of these toxic chemicals were usually measured at levels below OSHA standards, these standards are set for the eight-hour work day. People who work longer than eight hours on the pile or who live near ground zero are exposed for much longer periods. And those individuals who both live and work in the area are exposed continuously.