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Stuyvesant HS to get stringent air tests

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Crews are cleaning Stuyvesant High School round the clock, but parents and teachers have enlisted their own experts to determine whether it is safe to return.

Two 80-man crews are power-vacuuming air ducts of debris dust, replacing carpeting and hosing down the 10-story building in a scramble to reopen it on Oct. 9.

The building is so close to the site of the Sept. 11 attacks that the school's Web site described it as "In the shadow of the World Trade Center."

It was used as an emergency command and staging area for rescue efforts before being turned back over to the Board of Education Tuesday.

The explosions and collapse of the 110-story towers coated lower Manhattan with the incinerated debris of the buildings, and sent waves of smoke and dust as far as Brooklyn.

Environmental cleaning crews are expected to finish the work at Stuyvesant next Wednesday to

allow for nearly a week of air quality testing by the Board of Education, the United Federation of Teachers and experts working for the Stuyvesant parents' association.

The tentative reopening date for the elite, science-oriented school is Oct. 9.

"We will begin testing, especially for air quality, next Thursday, and if we are unsatisfied with the results, we will make a different decision about reopening Oct. 9," said Karen Finney, a spokeswoman for Schools Chancellor Harold Levy.

Dust samples taken by the federal Environmental Protection Agency outside Stuyvesant on Sept. 19 found asbestos levels were twice the allowed figures, according to agency spokeswoman Mary Helen Cervantes.

However, air samples taken outside the high school Sept. 22 to Sept. 24 showed airborne asbestos levels — the more dangerous form — below federal hazardous levels.

Air quality concern

The EPA is putting together a



LARRY ZIMWALT

TOO CLOSE Stuyvesant High School, near the site of World Trade Center, will be carefully inspected before it is reopened.

schedule for taking samples inside the high school.

Marilena Christodoulou, president of the Stuyvesant parents' association, said her group enlisted three private firms to run independent health and safety tests to ensure the board keeps its pledge to conduct the most rigorous air and safety tests available.

"Parents' greatest concern is that there is ongoing, daily monitoring of air quality once the students return," she said.

Critics, however, question whether Stuyvesant or any of the seven other evacuated schools should be reopened while excavation continues at the trade center site.

"Open trucks full of debris are going up the West Side Highway. Open barges are going up the river. Every time they dig further, more fumes are released. Until that stops, the schools should not be opened," said Joel Kupferman of the New York Environmental Law and Justice Project.

EPA reported that 11 dust samples taken around the perimeter of Ground Zero Sept. 23 showed no readings for asbestos-containing material.

Similar cleanup and testing also is being done at another evacuated school, Public School 150 on Greenwich St. and Independence Plaza. No reopening date has been set.

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