

DAILY NEWS, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2001

Asbestos found in offices

By MAKI BECKER
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Many who live and work in lower Manhattan have been worried about what's in the air outside.

But a Virginia-based engineering firm hired to test asbestos levels around the collapsed World Trade Center has found that a danger may lurk in the dust that found its way inside apartments and offices.

Tests conducted over the last two weeks by HP Environmental found very tiny particles of asbestos inside some office and apartment buildings.

Asbestos in its more commonly found form — hair-shaped strands that can lodge inside the lungs when inhaled — leads to respiratory ailments and even

cancer.

There's much debate over whether the smaller particles are hazardous to health.

Control is vital

But Piotr Chmielinski, one of the principals at HP Environmental, has two suggestions for dealing with dust accumulated inside homes and offices: Wipe surfaces with a wet cloth or mop and clean floors with a vacuum cleaner equipped with special filters.

"Controlling the substance is

the key in the cleanup," Chmielinski said.

Very little asbestos was found in the air outside buildings because of the rain over the last three weeks washing away the dust, Chmielinski said.

"But inside the buildings there is a lot of dry powder," the engineer said. "We believe that the cleanup, based on those findings, needs to be carried out more carefully."

Echoing previous statements by federal officials, City Health Commissioner Neal Cohen said yesterday at a news briefing that recent tests have indicated asbestos levels are within safe limits in lower Manhattan.

However, the federal Environ-

mental Protection Agency found asbestos in dust samples taken inside Stuyvesant High School last week, though air samples were free of airborne asbestos, the most dangerous form.

HP Environmental, which was hired by a contractor helping with the Trade Center cleanup and which also tested for asbestos after the 1993 bombing of the twin towers, is urging federal and city officials to make sure labs analyzing the asbestos levels are checking for particles of all sizes.

He said it is possible labs were missing the smallest pieces of asbestos in the samples, leading to an inaccurate estimate of the contamination.

CITY_21MC100_011830830