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Agencies OK Ground Zero Safety Rules

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STAFF WRITER

Government agencies and construction industry leaders have agreed to a uniform set of safety rules and standards for workers at Ground Zero.

Representatives of several construction firms working the site, the Fire Department, the city's office of Design and Construction, the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration and U.S. Labor Secretary Elaine Chao are expected to announce the guidelines today in midtown.

The rules are intended to prevent injuries and illness to workers removing debris from Ground Zero.

"We are pledging to work together to implement one of the most extensive safety programs in the country," said Louis J. Coletti, the chairman of the Building Trades Employers Association. "The cleanup is about to enter a new phase. While the first phase stressed recovery, this phase will stress a traditional construction approach so we can clean up as quickly as possible and get to the task of rebuilding."

Central to the agreement, Coletti said, is the promise to train all supervisors and workers before they work at Ground Zero and to make them aware of all potential hazards and how to protect themselves.

The trainers had their first meeting yesterday, Coletti said. So far no fatalities or serious injuries have been reported by workers at Ground Zero.

On the day the safety agreement was made public, a coalition of local politicians called on the city to form a single agency to monitor environmental safety in lower Manhattan.

The Ground Zero Elected Officials Task Force, formed within a week of Sept. 11, includes Rep. Jerrold Nadler, Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, as well as members of the State Senate, State Assembly and the City Council.

The task force would like one agency to monitor environmental safety in the clean up of Ground Zero and to respond to concerns by the residents and businesses in Lower Manhattan.

Among the issues the task force is concerned about are the collateral dust spread by trucks transporting the debris and the dust that still remains on some rooftops and buildings around Ground Zero.

"These issues have to be handled in order to create confidence," Nadler said. "There are economic consequences. It's very nice to talk about rebuilding but if people don't trust the air, no one is going to want to work there."

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