



OSHA ARCHIVE

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News Release

U.S. Department of Labor

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OSHA Pitching In To Assist With Worker Safety Measures, Asbestos Tests Department Will Also Begin To Process Workers Compensation Claims

WASHINGTON - U.S. Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao announced today that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is providing advice and technical assistance to employers and federal agencies to help protect workers from exposure to hazardous substances in the New York City and Pentagon disaster sites.

In New York, OSHA is testing asbestos levels in buildings within a several block radius surrounding the perimeter of the World Trade Center emergency site.

"OSHA is working with other federal agencies to help employees return to their jobsites as quickly as possible. Initial reports on asbestos levels in outlying buildings are extremely encouraging. OSHA's goal is to ensure that people who enter buildings near or downwind from the emergency area are protected and provided with all of the safety information possible," said Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao.

OSHA inspectors are working in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to test asbestos levels in New York City. EPA sampling of ambient air quality have found either no asbestos or very low levels of asbestos. Sampling of bulk materials and dust found generally low levels of asbestos.

OSHA has also been advising Consolidated Edison regarding safety standards for employees who are digging trenches because of leaking gas lines underground. The agency is advising the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms regarding worker protection during rescue operations.

At the Pentagon, OSHA is assisting with concerns about asbestos exposure and structural damage during rescue operations.

In addition to OSHA's role, Chao also highlighted the role of the Department of Labor's Office of Workers Compensation Claims (OWCP), which has established teams to expedite processing of workers' compensation claims for eligible federal staff and emergency personnel.

The Federal Employees' Compensation Act covers all civilian federal employees who sustain injuries while on duty assisting recovery efforts in the Pentagon and World Trade Center attacks and subsequent rescue operations. Surviving spouses and dependent children are also entitled to benefits.

The Department of Defense has set up a crisis center in Crystal City to assist Pentagon personnel and their relatives, and the Department of Labor has OWCP staff and computer equipment on site to process claims immediately. Federal civilian employees are also encouraged to call 1-866-999-FECA for assistance on compensation claims.

"As President Bush stated, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack this week," said Labor Secretary Chao. "In the midst of this tragedy, we have resolved to do the work of the people. Checks should go

out; claims should be processed; and work sites should be inspected. The only way these attacks will succeed is if they prevent our government from serving the American people. This will not happen. Our resolve to do our duty and serve the country we love will not be deterred or diminished by terrorist acts."

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