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EPA INITIATES EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACTIVITIES, REASSURES PUBLIC ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

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Environmental News

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**EPA INITIATES EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACTIVITIES,
REASSURES PUBLIC ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS**

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christie Whitman today announced that EPA is taking steps to ensure the safety of rescue workers and the public at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon disaster sites, and to protect the environment. EPA is working with state, federal, and local agencies to monitor and respond to potential environmental hazards and minimize any environmental effects of the disasters and their aftermath.

At the request of the New York City Department of Health, EPA and the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) have been on the scene at the World Trade Center monitoring exposure to potentially contaminated dust and debris. Monitoring and sampling conducted on Tuesday and Wednesday have been very reassuring about potential exposure of rescue crews and the public to environmental contaminants.

EPA's primary concern is to ensure that rescue workers and the public are not exposed to elevated levels of asbestos, acidic gases or other contaminants from the debris. Sampling of ambient air quality found either no asbestos or very low levels of asbestos.

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Sampling of bulk materials and dust found generally low levels of asbestos.

The levels of lead, asbestos and volatile organic compounds in air samples taken on Tuesday in Brooklyn, downwind from the World Trade Center site, were not detectable or not of concern.

Additional sampling of both ambient air quality and dust particles was conducted Wednesday night in lower Manhattan and Brooklyn, and results were uniformly acceptable.

A EPA is greatly relieved to have learned that there appears to be no significant levels of asbestos dust in the air in New York City, @ said Administrator Whitman. **A** We are working closely with rescue crews to ensure that all appropriate precautions are taken. We will continue to monitor closely. @

Public health concerns about asbestos contamination are primarily related to long-term exposure. Short-term, low-level exposure of the type that might have been produced by the collapse of the World Trade Center buildings is unlikely to cause significant health effects. EPA and OSHA will work closely with rescue and cleanup crews to minimize their potential exposure, but the general public should be very reassured by initial sampling.

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EPA and OSHA will continue to monitor and sample for asbestos, and will work with the appropriate officials to ensure that rescue workers, cleanup crews and the general public are properly informed about appropriate steps that should be taken to ensure proper handling, transportation and disposal of potentially contaminated debris or materials.

EPA is taking steps to ensure that response units implement appropriate engineering controls to minimize environmental hazards, such as water sprays and rinsing to prevent or minimize potential exposure and limit releases of potential contaminants beyond the debris site.

EPA is also conducting downwind sampling for potential chemical and asbestos releases from the World Trade Center debris site. In addition, EPA has deployed federal On-Scene Coordinators to the Washington, D.C. Emergency Operations Center, Fort Meade, and FEMA's alternate Regional Operations Center in Pennsylvania, and has deployed an On-Scene Coordinator to the Virginia Emergency Operations Center.

Under its response authority, EPA will use all available resources and staff experts to facilitate a safe emergency response and cleanup.

EPA will work with other involved agencies as needed to:

~ procure and distribute respiratory and eye protection equipment in cooperation

with the Dept. of Health and Human Services;

~ provide health and safety training upon request;

~ design and implement a site monitoring plan;

~ provide technical assistance for site control and decontamination; and

~ provide some 3000 asbestos respirators, 60 self-contained breathing apparatuses

and 10,000 protective clothing suits to the two disaster sites.

New York Governor George E. Pataki has promised to provide emergency electric generators to New York City in efforts to restore lost power caused by Tuesday = s tragedy, and EPA will work with State authorities to expedite any necessary permits for those generators.

OSHA is also working with Consolidated Edison regarding safety standards for employees who are digging trenches because of leaking gas lines underground. OSHA has advised Con Edison to provide its employees with appropriate respirators so they can proceed with emergency work, shutting off gas leaks in the city.

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