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WHITMAN DETAILS ONGOING AGENCY EFFORTS TO MONITOR DISASTER SITES, CONTRIBUTE TO CLEANUP EFFORTS

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Environmental News

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WHITMAN DETAILS ONGOING AGENCY EFFORTS TO MONITOR DISASTER SITES, CONTRIBUTE TO CLEANUP EFFORTS

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EPA Administrator Christie Whitman announced today that results from the Agency = s air and drinking water monitoring near the World Trade Center and Pentagon disaster sites indicate that these vital resources are safe. Whitman also announced that EPA has been given up to \$83 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to support EPA = s involvement in cleanup activities and ongoing monitoring of environmental conditions in both the New York City and Washington metropolitan areas following last week= s terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

A We are very encouraged that the results from our monitoring of air quality and drinking water conditions in both New York and near the Pentagon show that the public in these areas is not being exposed to excessive levels of asbestos or other harmful substances,@ Whitman said. **A** Given the scope of the tragedy from last week, I am glad to reassure the people of New York and Washington, D.C. that their air is safe to breath and their water is safe to drink,@ she added.

In the aftermath of last Tuesday = s attacks, EPA has worked closely with state, federal and local authorities to provide expertise on cleanup methods for hazardous materials, as well as to detect whether any contaminants are found in ambient air quality monitoring, sampling of drinking water sources and sampling of runoff near the disaster sites.

At the request of FEMA, EPA has been involved in the cleanup and site monitoring

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efforts, working closely with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and state and local organizations.

EPA has conducted repeated monitoring of ambient air at the site of the World Trade Center and in the general Wall Street district of Manhattan, as well as in Brooklyn. The Agency is planning to perform air monitoring in the surrounding New York metropolitan area. EPA has established 10 continuous (stationary) air monitoring stations near the WTC site. Thus far, from 50 air samples taken, the vast majority of results are either non-detectable or below established levels of concern for asbestos, lead and volatile organic compounds. The highest levels of asbestos have been detected within one-half block of ground zero, where rescuers have been provided with appropriate protective equipment.

R-158 - more -

In lower Manhattan, the City of New York has also been involved in efforts to clean anything coated with debris dust resulting from Tuesday = s destruction. This involves spraying water over buildings, streets and sidewalks to wash the accumulated dust off the building and eliminate the possibility that materials would become airborne. To complement this clean up effort, EPA has performed 62 dust sample analyses for the presence of asbestos and other substances. Most dust samples fall below EPA = s definition of **A** asbestos containing material @ (one percent asbestos). Where samples have shown greater than one percent asbestos, EPA has operated its 10 High Efficiency Particulate Arresting, HEPA, vacuum trucks to clean the area and then resample. EPA also used the 10 HEPA vac trucks to clean streets and sidewalks in the Financial District in preparation for Monday= s return to business. The Agency plans to use HEPA vac trucks to clean the lobbies of the five federal buildings near the World Trade Center site, and to clean the streets outside of New York = s City Hall.

Drinking water in Manhattan was tested at 13 sampling points, in addition to one test at the Newtown Sewage Treatment plant and pump station. Initial results of this drinking water sampling show that levels of asbestos are well below EPA= s levels of concern.

While FEMA has provided EPA with a Total Project Ceiling cost of slightly more than \$83 million for the Agency = s cleanup efforts in New York City and in at the Pentagon site, EPA currently is working with emergency funding of \$23.7 million. If costs exceed this level, FEMA will authorize EPA to tap additional funding in increments of \$15 million. As part of the additional funding to be provided by FEMA, EPA will be responsible for any hazardous waste disposal, general site safety and providing sanitation facilities for many of the search and rescue workers to wash the dust off following their shifts. EPA is coordinating with both the U.S. Air Force Center for Environmental Excellence and the U.S. Coast Guard to quickly implement these additional responsibilities to ensure that search and rescue personnel are provided with the maximum support and protection from hazardous materials that may be found during their mission.

At the Pentagon explosion site in Arlington Va., EPA has also been involved in a variety of monitoring of air and water quality. All ambient air monitoring results, both close to the crash site and in the general vicinity, have shown either no detection of asbestos or levels that fall well below the Agency = s level of concern. Testing of runoff water from the disaster site does not show elevated levels of contaminants. Given the large numbers of Department of Defense (DOD) employees returning to work this week, EPA has worked closely with officials from DOD and from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to evaluate air and drinking water quality and to be certain that the workplace environment will be safe.

While careful not to impede the search, rescue and cleanup efforts at either the World

Trade Center or the Pentagon disaster sites, EPA's primary concern has been to ensure that rescue workers and the public are not being exposed to elevated levels of potentially hazardous contaminants in the dust and debris, especially where practical solutions are available to reduce exposure. EPA has assisted efforts to provide dust masks to rescue workers to minimize inhalation of dust. EPA also recommends that the blast site debris continue to be kept wet, which helps to significantly reduce the amount of airborne dust which can aggravate respiratory ailments such as asthma. On-site facilities are being made available for rescue workers to clean themselves, change their clothing and to have dust-laden clothes cleaned separately from normal household wash.

R-158# # #

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