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World Trade Center Catastrophe Work-site and Residence Re-occupancy Fact Sheet
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BACK TO WORK OR HOME IN THE WORLD TRADE CENTER AREA

Workers and residents returning to the World Trade Center area need to know how to protect their health and safety.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY BUILDING IS SAFE?

- **STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY**

New York City requires that building owners and managers assess the strength and stability of their buildings before allowing workers or residents to move back in.

- **ESSENTIAL SERVICES**

New York City requires that gas, water, electrical, and steam services be fully operational, clean, and safe (for example, no exposed wiring) before workers or residents move back in.

→ **If you have questions or concerns about structural integrity or essential services, call the New York City Department of Health at (212) 213-1844.**

WHAT SHOULD MY EMPLOYER OR LANDLORD DO ABOUT DUST? **WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

- **DUST MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH**

Most test results from EPA and OSHA sampling in the World Trade Center area indicate no or very low concentrations of toxic substances, including asbestos. (Some results have been higher.) However, breathing in fine particulate matter (dust), even if it does not contain toxic materials like asbestos, can cause respiratory irritation and may worsen or trigger a chronic illness such as asthma. Persons with pre-existing respiratory conditions are most at risk.

The best approach to take is:

- 1. Workplaces and homes within the area bounded by Chambers, Broadway, and Rector Streets and the Hudson River should be professionally tested for contaminants before re-occupancy. Contamination is also possible in**

nearby areas, where the decision to test before re-occupancy should be made on a case-by-case basis. Positive test results indicate that a technical abatement by qualified professionals is needed. In no event should dust be swept or vacuumed with a normal vacuum.

2. If test results are negative for contaminants, have your workplace or residence professionally cleaned for dust as outlined below. Your employer should arrange for dust to be removed from your work place by qualified experts before you move back in. Tenants should ask their building owners for the same type of professional clean-up by qualified experts. NYC Department of Environmental Protection (1-718-DEP-HELP) and NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services (212-669-2670) have issued guidelines for safe re-occupancy of buildings.

3. As a last resort, if you must clean up dust yourself (not recommended), strictly follow all the guidelines below.

- **PROPER DUST CLEAN-UP**

Effective clean-up of dust requires that it be prevented from becoming airborne again. No dry sweeping or standard vacuuming should be permitted. Hard surfaces should be wet-cleaned (with a wet mop or wet rag) and HEPA vacuumed. Soft surfaces should be HEPA vacuumed. (HEPA stands for High Efficiency Particulate Air filter. Professional cleaning services should already be equipped with HEPA vacuums. Department and hardware stores sell HEPA vacuums for residential use.) After use, rags and mops should be bagged while still wet and then discarded.

- **SAFE DUST CLEAN-UP**

All persons performing clean-up operations should wear air purifying respirators. Adequate protection will be provided by properly fitting disposable particulate respirators rated N95. (Disposable dust masks do not provide adequate respiratory protection and should not be used.) Waterproof gloves should also be worn. Work clothes should be bagged before leaving the area and laundered separately. Rigorous personal hygiene is essential. Hands should be washed before eating, drinking, smoking, touching your face, or using the bathroom.

- **MINIMIZING DUST AFTER CLEAN-UP**

Recovery operations may go on for many months. During this time it is likely higher than usual levels of airborne dust may continue to spread throughout nearby areas. To minimize the amount of dust entering your workplace or home, keep windows and doors closed. Wiping your feet on a doormat helps prevent dust from being tracked in. HEPA air purifiers (available in department and hardware stores) can be effective in reducing dust levels in small spaces. Regular wet-mopping and HEPA vacuuming are recommended.

→ **See also the NYCOSH World Trade Center Catastrophe Worker Health Fact Sheet (<http://www.nycosh.org/wtc-catastrophe-factsheet.pdf>).**

→ **For basic information on respiratory protection and legal requirements, see the OSHA Small Entity Compliance Guide for Respiratory Protection Standard (<http://www.osha-slc.gov/Publications/secgrev-current.pdf>).**

ASBESTOS AND OTHER TOXIC SUBSTANCES

The Trade Center collapse and ongoing recovery efforts have resulted in the release of various toxic substances into the air. These include asbestos, silica, fiberglass, and lead. The further from ground zero your workplace or residence is located, the lower the concentration of toxic substances is likely to be. While there is no known safe level of exposure to carcinogens (cancer-causing agents) such as asbestos, the lower the exposure, the

lower the risk. OSHA standards impose legal limits (Permissible Exposure Limits - PELs) on workplace exposure to asbestos and other toxic substances. If your workplace or home tests positive for asbestos, fiberglass, silica, lead, or other toxic contaminants, clean-up will require a technical abatement by qualified professionals. **(For more information on asbestos or other toxics, contact NYCOSH).**

- ➔ **If your employer monitors for toxic substances, s/he is required by OSHA Standard 29 CFR 1910.1020 (Access to Employee Exposure and Medical Records) to share the results with you or your union.**
- ➔ **Residential tenants may be eligible for reimbursement for clean-up expenses. Call the Federal Emergency Management Minimal Repairs Assistance Program at 1-800-462-9029 for further information.**

HEATING, VENTILATING, AND AIR-CONDITIONING SYSTEMS

Special attention should be paid to the condition of mechanical ventilation (HVAC, or heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning) systems. Air handling units and ductwork should be inspected, and, if necessary, professionally cleaned. The HVAC system should be run at full capacity for an extended period of time to force particulate matter out of the system **before** cleaning and reoccupying

workplaces or residences. After cleaning, filters should be changed and upgraded, if possible, to provide increased protection against continuing air contamination from the ground-zero area. Window air conditioners should be professionally cleaned. If run, they should be used only to recirculate air (*i.e.*, outside vent closed). If not cleaned, units should be sealed off with plastic sheets and duct tape.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT COMPENSATION OR HEALTH HAZARDS, OR ABOUT LAWS AND REGULATIONS CONCERNING COMPENSATION OR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH, PLEASE CONTACT:

New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH)
212-627-3900. Fax: 212-627-9812. E-mail: nycosh@nycosh.org.

<http://www.nycosh.org/wtc-reoccupancy-factsheet.pdf>

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