

Report Confirms Problems with EPA WTC Indoor "Test and Clean" Program

Prepared at the request of Sen. Hillary Clinton D-N.Y., as well as Congress members Jerrold Nadler D-N.Y. and Carolyn Maloney D-N.Y., a recently released Government Accountability Office (GAO) report detailed serious flaws in EPA's second program seeking to address the indoor contamination resulting from the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC), as well as the agency's ability to deal with future disasters involving indoor envi-

ronmental impacts. report also said EPA was wrong to have left the job of testing workplaces to other federal agencies and found that EPA ignored the advice of its own technical experts – members of the "EPA World Trade Center Technical Review Panel" – in the development of the plan, with 16 out of 18 of the panel members not endorsing the plan. Further, the independent analysis concluded that EPA's early inaction led to its total failure, to date, to properly "characterize" the extent of the WTC contamination and that EPA officials misled the public when they mischaracterized the results of earlier asbestos testing.

EPA's first post-9/11 testing and clean up program, conducted in 2002 and 2003, also had similar failures and was forcefully criticized by EPA's own Inspector General (IG). The second program also didn't live up to one of the recommendations made by the IG: to develop an approach to determine or "characterize" the actual extent of the

World Trade Center contamination in the New York metro area.

Looking forward, the report also warns that EPA is not prepared to respond to future disasters that have an indoor contamination component because EPA has still "not developed protocols on how and when to collect data to determine the extent of indoor contamination."

The GAO report makes several recommendations for EPA, namely, that it should communicate risks to the public by presenting environmental data in a clear and appropriate context, create guidelines for estimating program costs and swiftly develop protocols that specifically address indoor contamination. GAO notes that if EPA continues to fail in its responsibility, "important public health needs, including resident and worker health, may not be promptly addressed."



caption to come

ronmental impacts.

"EPA and the Bush administration ignored the advice of scientific experts, dragged their heels and failed to produce a real program to test for and clean up toxic World Trade Center dust in people's homes and offices," Clinton said. "We need a new clean up program from EPA and a renewed commitment to be better prepared for future disasters."

Released on Sept. 5, the report noted that the program was inadequately financed and poorly implemented. Most disturbingly, the GAO report says the EPA cleanup program has not been made available to every household contaminated with toxic World Trade Center dust following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In addition, GAO said testing should have been extended to people living in Brooklyn and parts of Manhattan farther away from Ground Zero. The

Briefs

Utah Mine Hearing

Worker safety concerns should have kept MSHA from accepting a plan for retreat mining at the Crandall Canyon Mine, said United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) President Cecil Roberts on Sept. 5 at a Capitol Hill hearing.

According to Roberts, MSHA should have known that the company had no business in engaging in retreat mining as Crandall Canyon's previous owner, Andalex Resources, decided against retreat mining after determining the only coal left in the mine was supporting the barriers and pillars necessary to hold up the roof of the mine's main entrance and exit points. In addition, the agency should have known the mine had suffered a "bump," an explosion of coal walls due to pressure exerted by the big mountain above, in March 2007, which occurred only a couple of hundred of feet away from where the six miners are presumed to be entombed.

Asbestos Concerns

The reintroduction of legislation banning asbestos sponsored by Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., has prompted the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) to express concern that the bill only takes issue with new uses of asbestos and does not address concerns with the millions of pounds of asbestos already in use that continue to pose a health threat.

In a letter sent to Murray's attention, AIHA President Donald Hart pointed out that an outright ban would not take issue with controlling exposure to asbestos already in use, an issue which some AIHA members confront every day. According to him, any application of asbestos in a product where the material becomes "friable" should no longer be continued.

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