



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

CHAIRMAN

October 27, 2003

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
United States Senate
476 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman
United States Senate
706 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Clinton and Lieberman:

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your September 9th letter, building on the subsequent constructive discussions that I have had with Senator Clinton and that our respective staffs have had concerning your questions about lower Manhattan air quality in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks and subsequent efforts the government has undertaken to further assure public health and safety. This letter sets out our understanding following those staff discussions.

The tragedy of September 11th was unprecedented in its scope. The complexity of the situation facing the local, state and federal governments in responding to this terrorist attack was immense – the work by all was heroic.

The Environmental Protection Agency working with the Council on Environmental Quality, OSHA and the State and City of New York, did their utmost to communicate the best available information accurately, and in a timely fashion to meet the needs of lower-Manhattan residents, workers and businesses. Their safety, health and well-being were our greatest concerns, and remain so today. The information was communicated through a variety of methods, including press releases, direct communications with residents and media interviews with federal, state and local officials. We continue to stand by the information distributed in press releases regarding potential long-term health risks. The EPA Inspector General reported that the experts her office spoke to generally confirmed that EPA's draft risk evaluation tended to support EPA's statements on long-term health effects.

As we discussed, the federal government's communications in September of 2001 were conveyed real-time in complex and fast-moving circumstances. In all instances, we acted with the best available data at the time, and updated our communications and actions as new data was coming in. We all learned a great deal in the aftermath of September 11th, including how to improve our response and communications efforts. Given a situation with the uncertainty and emotions such as followed the World Trade Center attacks, we recognize that we can communicate best through a focused, civil, and collaborative effort. After September 11th, EPA conducted a "lessons learned" exercise and, in conjunction with the new Department of

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Homeland Security, improved its emergency response and crisis communications system, improvements that were successfully put to test in the swift and well-coordinated response to the space shuttle Columbia tragedy in February.

In her prior letter to you, Acting Administrator Horinko outlined many actions the EPA is continuing to take in response to this tragedy. Ms. Horinko described the substantial amount of monitoring, cleaning and re-cleaning already conducted, the coordination between EPA, FEMA and OSHA on indoor cleanup, OSHA's commitment to continue to investigate complaints of dust exposure from workers in commercial establishments, and EPA's ongoing focus on residences.

In my meeting with Senator Clinton, we discussed at length the process of coordination following the attacks, including CEQ's role. We have since shared with your staffs a compilation of federal air quality and related health studies conducted in the vicinity of Ground Zero which the Office of Science and Technology Policy completed in December 2002, as well as asbestos monitoring data for workers OSHA provided to the EPA. As you know, of the more than 4100 residential units in Lower Manhattan examined as part of EPA's indoor air quality and cleaning program only about 1 percent were found to have asbestos at levels exceeding the health-based standard for long-term risk. We hope this exchange has provided a clearer understanding of the interagency coordination process and a greater knowledge of the breadth of activities undertaken by the federal government immediately following September 11th and since.

To provide greater collaboration in ongoing efforts to monitor the situation for New York residents and workers and assure them of their current safety, we will be undertaking the following activities: 1) extend the health follow-up associated with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's (ATSDR) registry of residents and workers; and 2) convene an expert technical review panel to help guide the agencies' use of the available exposure and health surveillance databases and registries to characterize any remaining exposures and risks, identify unmet public health needs, and recommend any steps to further minimize the risks associated with the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks. EPA would organize and lead this group of experts, with representation from the federal agencies directly involved in the air quality response and monitoring, the New York City Departments of Health and Environmental Protection, and outside experts. The panel would review the following:

Within 3-6 months:

- Post cleaning verification sampling to be done by EPA in the residential areas included in EPA's Indoor Air Cleanup to verify that re-contamination has not occurred from central heating and air conditioning systems;
- The peer reviewed "World Trade Center Indoor Air Assessment and Selection of Contaminants of Concern and Setting Health-Based Benchmarks," which concluded asbestos was an appropriate surrogate in determining risk for other contaminants.

Within 18-24 months:

- Identification of any areas where the health registry could be enhanced to allow better tracking of post-exposure risks by workers and residents.

- Review and synthesize the ongoing work by the federal, state and local governments and private entities to determine the characteristics of the WTC plume and where it was dispersed, including the geographic extent of EPA and other entities' monitoring and testing, and recommend any additional evaluations for consideration by EPA and other public agencies.

We look forward to working with you. Clearly, we are agreed that the health of New York's residents and workers is paramount. By working together, we can ensure their needs are met.

Sincerely,



James L. Connaughton