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**TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CLEAN AIR, WETLANDS, AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

February 11, 2002

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. I am Jane M. Kenny, Region 2 Administrator with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I welcome this opportunity to join my federal, state and city colleagues to discuss the ongoing response to the tragic events of September 11 by EPA.

Today is February 11, 2002. It has been five months since that terrible day. After months of incredibly intense work, we can now reflect on the impacts of the attacks and the extraordinary efforts made by so many individuals and government at all levels. EPA and our federal, state and city partners have all played important roles in the protection of public health and the cleanup efforts. Today, we look toward the future and the ultimate recovery of lower Manhattan.

On the morning of September 11, EPA responded immediately as events unfolded. Our emergency response teams were on the scene that day in lower Manhattan, in Brooklyn, where the smoke plume was moving, and in New Jersey -- assessing the possible public health and environmental impacts of the attacks. Let me assure you that EPA's highest priority then and throughout this response has been protecting the health of everyone in the New York metropolitan area.

Since September 11, EPA and other federal, state and city agencies have taken over 10,000 samples of dust, air, drinking water, and stormwater runoff at and around the World Trade Center site. We have also sampled in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island, at the Fresh Kills landfill and in New Jersey.

In addition to the monitoring conducted by our federal, state and city partners, we have tested for the presence of pollutants such as asbestos, fine particulate matter, lead and other metals, volatile organic compounds, dioxin, PCBs and other substances that could pose a threat to the public and workers at the site. These samples are taken from more than 20 fixed monitoring stations at and around ground zero and an existing New York State air quality monitoring network that was augmented for the World Trade Center response.

The Agency also uses portable sampling equipment to collect data from a range of locations in lower Manhattan. Fortunately, the vast majority of our tests continue to find levels of these contaminants below standards or guidelines set to protect public health. We have also found that environmental conditions on and off the site have improved considerably over time.

While this news may be reassuring to the general public, it is important to emphasize – as we have from day one – that the risks are different for response workers at the World Trade Center site; they have been working long hours in dusty and what were very smokey conditions. That is why we have repeatedly said that response workers should wear respirators and other protective gear.

We have found asbestos fibers in some of the outdoor air and dust samples taken at ground zero and in the surrounding area. To date, out of more than 5,500 outdoor air samples taken at and around the site, only 15 have had levels of asbestos that exceed the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act or AHERA standard, we use to determine if children can re-enter a school building after asbestos has been removed or abated. Of the 15 exceedances, all but four were recorded before September 30.

Where we found elevated levels of asbestos in the dust or where dusty conditions were observed, EPA used large HEPA vacuum trucks to pick it up. We've cleaned sidewalks, the promenade at Battery Park City, local playgrounds and parks and even children's sand boxes. EPA has led the effort to monitor the outdoor environment with support from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), while the city of New York has taken the lead for the reoccupancy of buildings.

We do know that some people returning to area homes and businesses have found dusty environments. EPA recommends that interiors be cleaned with the assumption that any dust may contain asbestos. The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has issued instructions to building owners and managers directing them to use professional asbestos inspectors to assess the presence of asbestos-containing materials and to use licensed abatement contractors to conduct any necessary cleanup work. EPA, the Department of Health and Human Services through the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the New York City Department of Health (DOH) has recommended ongoing and frequent cleaning to minimize future risks from any dust that might remain. All cleanups should be done using wet wipe methods on surfaces and vacuums with HEPA – high efficiency particulate air - filters.

Regarding some federal buildings, EPA took a small number of indoor air samples in several

buildings. The General Services Administration changed the filters on the air conditioning systems and, after noting significant amounts of dust tracked into federal building lobbies by workers responding at the World Trade Center, asked EPA to have them cleaned.

The lobby cleanup, announced in a September 18 press release, was done by EPA contractors using HEPA vacuum trucks already operating in the area. No other specialized cleanup was conducted on the upper floors at 290 Broadway or 26 Federal Plaza.

Now I would like to detail some of our other findings and response efforts. EPA has been testing for numerous volatile organic compounds or VOCs such as benzene – at several sites within and near the perimeter of the World Trade Center site. To protect workers, EPA takes what are called “grab” samples of VOCs where smoke plumes have been sighted. These samples – taken at ground level on the pile – provide a snapshot at a moment in time of worst case exposure. The samples – taken daily – are immediately analyzed at EPA’s highly sophisticated mobile laboratory set up at the perimeter of the site. The proximity allows us to relay the results directly to the New York City Fire Department.

EPA standards and guidelines are set with an ample margin of safety to protect public health. In some samples taken since September 11, EPA testing at ground zero has found the presence of benzene at levels that have exceeded federal guidelines. Taking the more protective approach, we continue to urge workers to wear their respirators.

However, EPA air samples of pollutants such as benzene taken at the perimeter of the work site find levels that are very low or non-detectable. Dioxin levels were generally below health-based guidelines. Once the fires were diminished, concentrations of several chemicals, declined in most cases to non-detectable levels, even at the work site.

DEC routinely monitors for fine particulates – those smaller than 2.5 microns – at their existing network of monitoring stations. DEC and EPA have added four additional monitoring stations in lower Manhattan. With a few exceptions early on, fine particulates have been below the level of concern for the general public, as well as groups more sensitive to air pollutants.

We know that materials in construction dust and smoke can be irritating to the eyes, nose, throat and respiratory tract. They can cause more serious reactions in sensitive populations, such as people with respiratory problems or asthma. Again, this is one of the reasons we have recommended that workers wear respirators and impacted homes and businesses be properly cleaned. Sensitive groups have been advised by New York City DOH and the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) to take special precautions and consult their physicians if they are experiencing symptoms.

In addition, we also tested drinking water in cooperation with New York City DEP and water quality in the Hudson and East Rivers. All samples of drinking water, which were analyzed for a wide range of contaminants, met federal standards. Analysis of runoff following heavy rain on September 14 did show some elevated levels of dioxins, asbestos and other pollutants. Followup sampling found levels back to those normally found in area waters.

Almost immediately after the attacks, Governor Pataki asked President Bush to declare a federal disaster, activating the Federal Response Plan. The plan becomes effective when destruction from a disaster goes beyond local and state capabilities. Twenty-seven federal agencies and the American Red Cross are activated to supplement state and city resources, with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the lead. In the World Trade Center response, federal agencies have provided funding, personnel, technical expertise, equipment and other resources at New York City's request. Acting on mission assignments generated by FEMA, EPA is the lead agency for hazardous waste disposal and has also taken primary responsibility for monitoring the ambient air, water and drinking water and coordinating the sampling data for all the response agencies. In addition, EPA was asked to manage worker and vehicle wash down operations at the site and the Fresh Kills landfill, which has been receiving debris from the disaster site.

In support of the agencies directly responsible for worker safety, EPA initially supplied the New York City Office of Emergency Management (OEM) 12,432 respirators, 37,600 dust cartridges, 13,000 pairs of safety glasses and 1000 hard hats. In addition, 1465 respirators, 2608 cartridges plus tyvek suits, booties and hard hats were provided to the New York State Departments of Environmental Conservation and Health. The U.S. Coast Guard, at the request of FEMA, worked with EPA to assist with the response, and the New York State National Guard conveyed the equipment to the city for distribution to response workers.

On September 11, EPA provided a flyer to FEMA for distribution at ground zero that emphasized the potential danger from asbestos and urged workers to wear protective gear. By September 20, EPA had set up worker wash down operations at the site, at which flyers were distributed and signs posted recommending the use of respirators and other protective gear. During daily interagency site operations meetings, EPA repeatedly emphasized the need for response workers to wear their respirators. This message was continuously reiterated at community meetings and with the press.

EPA has set up a full service, winterized wash station at which workers can vacuum off their work clothes, shower and change before going home. Signs directing workers to wear protective gear are posted. Several thousand workers pass through the wash station every day.

EPA recognizes that the collapse of towers was a cataclysmic event unlike any we have experienced. The monitoring data collected in response to this event, warrants further study. With this in mind, in October, EPA began a health risk evaluation and a comparative toxicological study. These are in addition to studies being conducted by other agencies and academic institutions.

Through our health risk evaluation, we hope to better understand the possible health risks to people who may have been exposed to various pollutants during several periods following the disaster. EPA is reviewing ambient air monitoring data gathered by EPA, OSHA, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and various academic and commercial entities.

The Agency is assessing possible exposures during the first days after the attack, the following several weeks and the subsequent months through early January. This evaluation focuses on the different population groups of concern – response workers and volunteers at ground zero, residents and workers in the immediate surrounding areas.

We expect to have a preliminary report completed this month, which we will share with your Subcommittee and the public. A more detailed evaluation, building on our initial findings, should be complete by early May, with the final report due in April 2003.

Our second investigation is a comparative toxicity analysis. The objective is to compare the toxicity of the particles released from the World Trade Center collapse to other particulate samples of high and low toxicity that have been tested on animals. In this effort, we are comparing particles collected from ground zero to fly ash from oil-fired power plants, dust recovered from the volcanic eruption of Mount St. Helens and urban ambient air particles.

EPA is also collaborating with New York City and state officials, with two components of the Department of Health and Human Services through the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and various academic institutions on research in progress and the identification of future research needs. These efforts will help us better understand the magnitude of any effects from the World Trade Center disaster.

In addition, EPA has supported the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the New York City Department of Health in their study of residences impacted by the

World Trade Center collapse. We are committed to helping residents and business employees in lower Manhattan address their concerns about the indoor air. We will continue to work with the city agencies until people are assured that their health is protected.

Before concluding, I would like to touch on one additional topic. From the start, EPA has been committed to sharing the results of our data with the public and to helping people understand what they mean. Under incredible circumstances – having witnessed the attacks and been evacuated from our lower Manhattan offices – EPA staff began the process of sampling, analyzing, interpreting and conveying environmental data to the first-line response agencies, the press and the public. All of the agencies use our data to assess the risks to workers and the public, and to develop approaches to address any concerns.

EPA has taken the lead in making the data available to the public through our Web site. Sampling results for the major pollutants of concern and daily summaries of our monitoring results are available at www.epa.gov. A complete set of laboratory results – updated daily – is available to the public at our offices at 290 Broadway in lower Manhattan.

Response workers and the people of New York have been through much trauma and uncertainty. We hope that our findings, comprising thousands of pages of text, will help them address concerns about their health and their environment. Be assured that we will be vigilant in our ongoing efforts.

As we look to the future, we will work with our federal, state and city partners and Congress, on science-based approaches that ensure that public health is protected.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to share the work of the many dedicated and professional EPA employees who have worked tirelessly to protect the health of all New Yorkers in the wake of this unprecedented event.