

Highlights of [GAO-07-1091](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and World Trade Center (WTC) collapse blanketed Lower Manhattan in dust from building debris. In response, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted an indoor clean and test program from 2002 to 2003. In 2003, EPA's Inspector General (IG) recommended improvements to the program and identified lessons learned for EPA's preparedness for future disasters. In 2004, EPA formed an expert panel to, among other goals, guide EPA in developing a second voluntary program; EPA announced this program in 2006.

As requested, GAO's report primarily addresses EPA's second program, including the (1) extent to which EPA incorporated IG and expert panel member recommendations and input; (2) factors, if any, limiting the expert panel's ability to meet its goals; (3) completeness of information EPA provided to the public; (4) way EPA estimated resources for the program; and (5) extent to which EPA has acted upon lessons learned regarding indoor contamination from disasters.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that EPA develop (1) guidance on crisis communication, (2) guidelines on cost estimates for disaster response, and (3) protocols specific to indoor contamination. EPA stated that it is taking actions on these recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1091.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact John B. Stephenson at (202) 512-3841 or stephensonj@gao.gov.

WORLD TRADE CENTER

EPA's Most Recent Test and Clean Program Raises Concerns That Need to Be Addressed to Better Prepare for Indoor Contamination Following Disasters

What GAO Found

EPA has incorporated some recommendations and input from the IG and expert panel members into its second program, but its decision not to include other items may limit the overall effectiveness of this program. For example, while EPA agreed to test for more contaminants, it did not agree to evaluate risks in areas north of Canal Street and in Brooklyn. EPA reported that it does not have a basis for expanding the boundaries of its program because it cannot distinguish between normal urban, or background, dust and WTC dust.

The expert panel's ability to meet its goals was limited by two factors: (1) EPA officials' belief that some panel goals were more appropriately addressed by other agencies, and (2) EPA's approach to managing the panel process. Furthermore, the majority of expert panel members believe the panel did not meet any of its goals, and that EPA's second program does not respond to the concerns of residents and workers affected by the disaster.

EPA's second plan does not fully inform the public about the results of its first program. EPA concluded that a "very small" number of samples from its first program exceeded risk levels for airborne asbestos. However, EPA did not provide information such as how representative the samples were of the affected area. Residents who could have participated in this voluntary second program might have opted not to do so because of EPA's conclusion about its first program.

EPA did not develop a comprehensive cost estimate to determine the resources needed to carry out its second program. EPA is implementing this program with \$7 million remaining from its first program.

While EPA has acted upon lessons learned following this disaster, some concerns remain about its preparedness to respond to indoor contamination following future disasters. Specifically, EPA has not developed protocols on how and when to collect data to determine the extent of indoor contamination, one of the concerns raised by panel members.

View of WTC Towers Collapse between 10:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. on September 11, 2001



Source: New York Police Department Photo Unit.