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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-07-806T](#), testimony before the Subcommittee on Superfund and Environmental Health, Committee on Environment and Public Works, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) turned Lower Manhattan into a disaster site. As the towers collapsed, Lower Manhattan was blanketed with building debris and combustible materials. This complex mixture created a major concern: that thousands of residents and workers in the area would now be exposed to known hazards in the air and in the dust, such as asbestos, lead, glass fibers, and pulverized concrete. In May 2002, New York City formally requested federal assistance to address indoor contamination. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted an indoor clean and test program from 2002 to 2003. Several years later, after obtaining the views of advisory groups, including its Inspector General and an expert panel, EPA announced a second test and clean program in December 2006. Program implementation is to begin later in 2007, more than 5 years after the disaster.

GAO's testimony, based on preliminary work evaluating EPA's development of its second program, addresses (1) EPA's actions to implement recommendations from the expert panel and its Inspector General, (2) the completeness of information EPA provided to the public in its second plan, and (3) EPA's assessment of available resources to conduct the program. We discussed the issues we address in this statement with EPA.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-806T.

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

Preliminary Observations on EPA's Second Program to Address Indoor Contamination

What GAO Found

EPA has taken some actions to incorporate recommendations from the Inspector General and expert panel members into its second program, but its decision not to incorporate other recommendations may limit the overall effectiveness of this program. For example, EPA's second program incorporates recommendations to expand the list of contaminants it tests for, and to test for contaminants in dust as well as the air. However, it does not incorporate a recommendation to expand the boundaries of cleanup to better ensure that WTC contamination is addressed in all locations. EPA reported that it does not have a basis for expanding the boundaries because it cannot distinguish between normal urban dust and WTC dust. EPA did not begin examining methods for differentiating between normal urban dust and WTC dust until nearly 3 years after the disaster, and therefore the process for finding distinctions was more difficult. In addition, EPA's second program does not incorporate recommendations to sample heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. According to EPA's plan, the agency chose to offer limited testing in a greater number of apartments and common areas rather than provide more comprehensive testing (such as in HVACs) in a smaller number of these areas.

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 explain that this conclusion was to be expected because it took over 80 percent of the samples after residences were professionally cleaned. Without this additional information, residents who could have participated might have opted not to do so because of EPA's conclusion.

EPA did not assess the adequacy of available resources for the second program. EPA stated that it plans to spend \$7 million on this program, which is not based on any assessment of costs, but is the funding remaining from the first program. Without careful planning for future disasters, timely decisions about data collection, and thorough communication of sampling results, an evaluation of the adequacy of cleanup efforts may be impossible.

Aerial Image of North World Trade Center Tower on 9/11



Source: NYPD Photo Unit.