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Survey: New Yorkers Unhappy With EPA Info
 Gov't Survey Says New Yorkers Dissatisfied With EPA Air Quality Info Provided After WTC Collapse

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON Sept. 26 — Most New Yorkers responding to a government survey didn't believe and were dissatisfied with the air quality information that the Environmental Protection Agency provided the public after the World Trade Center collapse, according to the agency's inspector general.

Most people surveyed "wanted more information regarding outdoor and indoor air quality, wanted this information in a more timely manner and did not believe the information they received," EPA Inspector General Nikki L. Tinsley concluded Friday.

The mailed survey, sent to 10,000 addresses throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island, was done between March and July. The agency compiled responses from 1,110 residents, fewer than 12 percent.

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Because of the low response rate to its questionnaire, the agency said it reached conclusions only about those surveyed and not about all New York residents.

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The survey found that 81.8 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the information about outdoor air quality and 84.8 percent were dissatisfied with information about indoor air quality.

The EPA announced Sept. 18, seven days after attack, that the air was "safe" to breathe and issued nine press releases by the end of 2001 reassuring the public about air quality.

But the survey found that in the weeks just after the Sept. 11 attack sizable majorities of New Yorkers responding to the survey perceived both short-term and long-term health risks from breathing both indoor and outdoor air.

In the weeks after the attack, short-term health risks from outdoor air were perceived by 88.4 percent of those surveyed who lived near the attack site in lower Manhattan and by 88.9 percent of those in the rest of New York. Short-term health risks from indoor air were perceived by 78.5 percent in lower Manhattan and by 75.6 percent in the rest of New York.

In the same period, long-term health risks from outdoor air were perceived by 68 percent of those in lower Manhattan and by 69.5 percent of those in the rest of New York. Long-term health risks from indoor air were perceived by 53.3 percent of those in lower Manhattan and by 58.6 percent of those in the rest of New York.

Tinsley, in a letter Friday to EPA Acting Administrator Marianne L. Horinko, said the survey results "also suggest a disconnect between government statements about air quality and respondents' perceptions of possible health risks" from the debris in lower Manhattan.

EPA spokeswoman Prudence Goforth said, however, that agency leaders were concerned the survey was misleading.

"There's not really anything new," she said. "I thought our response (after the Sept. 11 attacks) was adequate. There was just so much data put up on our Web site, and we did flyers and other outreach."

Last month, Tinsley put out a report saying the EPA gave New Yorkers misleading assurances at the White House's direction, downplaying the health risks from the debris by convincing the EPA to "add reassuring statements and delete cautionary ones."

EPA and administration officials have said their actions were based on national security and must be viewed in the perspective that the White House was dealing with an unprecedented terrorist attack.

Republican staff of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee said this week that, after studying Tinsley's conclusions, they believe EPA acted properly and that the agency and the administration adequately communicated the health risks to the public.

On the Net:

EPA Inspector General:

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