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Feds brush off FDNY plea for toxic cleanup

DAILY NEWS
Exclusive

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Federal environmental officials are refusing to scrub potentially toxic dust out of firehouses near Ground Zero - saying they agreed to clean up only apartments, not workplaces.

The city firefighters union said the Environmental Protection Agency has repeatedly turned down requests to clean four firehouses south of Canal St.

"Firefighters should be entitled to the same protections that the EPA has afforded everyone who lives in lower Manhattan," said Philip McArdle, Uniformed Firefighters Association health and safety officer.

But a top EPA official would not reconsider the policy when confronted yesterday by Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-Manhattan).

"We have not undertaken any cleanup of firehouses," said Kathleen Callahan, an EPA assistant regional administrator.

"The program that we have is strictly residential and therefore, we would not do firehouses," she said yesterday at an environmental forum at Fordham University.

The EPA agreed in May to scrub apartments possibly tainted with asbestos from the collapsed twin towers - after the agency was besieged with complaints from politicians and downtowners.

An EPA spokeswoman said that of the roughly 2,000 homes

tested by the EPA, 19 showed excessive levels of asbestos, which can cause chronic lung disease and cancer.

The extent of the overall contamination is still unknown, the spokeswoman said.

The EPA program is funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"It's about saving money and passing the buck," said Nadler, who said he believes the EPA may be worried that cleaning the firehouses could obligate them to clean other workplaces.

McCardle said firefighters have attempted to do the cleaning themselves, although they have no training for the job.

FDNY spokesman David Billig said checks of air quality in the firehouses slightly more than a year ago showed it did not pose a health threat.

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