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## EPA investigator criticizes government

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By **ROB GIOIELLI***Gazette staff writer*

When Hugh Kaufman goes to Ground Zero he can smell the hazardous waste, and he says the federal government is doing nothing about it.

"The U.S. government is imitating the former Soviet Union in its handling of the aftermath of (the World Trade Center collapse)," he said, likening the situation to the years after the nuclear power plant explosion at Chernobyl.

Kaufman, who is chief investigator for the Environmental Protection Agency's Ombudsman's office, looks into claims of wrongdoing by the EPA.

On Thursday he told a group from Beaufort's Creative Retirement Center that millions of pounds of lead, asbestos and other toxic chemicals are floating around lower Manhattan, endangering the health of people in that area.

The EPA and other state and federal agencies are assuring people the air is safe to breathe, he said.

"Asbestos was used in all of the products of the World Trade Center," he said. "Do you know how much asbestos came down? And it was all pulverized.

"You are talking about millions of people living and working down there that are affected," he said.

To solve the problem the government would have to evacuate lower Manhattan and launch a cleanup that would take months and cost about \$50 billion, he said.

Lower Manhattan was evacuated after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, but the government let people back in too soon, he said.

Why? They wanted to redevelop the site as quickly as possible, and insurance companies were having to pay out too much money to people and companies that were relocated, he said.

Now, however, people who live and work in the area are breathing in fine particles of hazardous waste, which will cause major health problems in the future, he said.

"These were innocent civilian victims of a terrorist attack and yet the government says, 'You are on your own,'" he said.

Kaufman compared the cover-up to what happened at Chernobyl. After the reactor exploded the Soviet Union told people they could return to the area near the nuclear power plant long before it was safe.

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The result was that more people died from the lingering effects of the disaster than in the actual explosion, and the same thing will happen with the World Trade Center, he said.

"You are probably going to have tens of thousands of people die of cancer who shouldn't have," he said.

People are beginning to take note of these problems at the site, Kaufman said. The local congressman, Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-New York, is holding hearings, as is a federal judge.

"Ultimately the right stuff is going to be done, but it's going to be a wrenching process," he said.

Some attendees at Kaufman's talk were shocked by what they heard. Others said they thought the presentation was one-sided and lacked scientific evidence.

"It bothered me that he made statements like that without (comment from) anyone from another side of the issue," said St. Helena Island resident Frank Grice.

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