

WTC Expert Technical Review Panel Panel Meeting

The World Trade Center was a microcosm, a city with its own zipcode. Cities are not individuals and do not have signatures or fingerprints. They contain many people each with his or her own signature and fingerprint. When they burn they produce many contaminants each with its own signature and fingerprint. No one mixed the contaminants of 9/11 together in that great mixing bowl in the sky. They were dispersed to different places according to their weight, when they burned and which way the wind was blowing at that time. EPA and independent testing have confirmed this.

Thus the quest for a WTC fingerprint may prove to be as quixotic as the quest for the elixir of eternal youth or the alchemical formula for gold. We certainly can't know in advance of representative testing whether there's a fingerprint. The only scientifically viable program at this point is one that tests for a broad spectrum of contaminants, possibly focussing on the lighter ones further from the site. Contaminants should not be dismissed on the grounds that they are what Pat Evangelista called 'nutrients.' We didn't know we were supposed to eat them instead of breathing them. And it is also scientifically indefensible to exclude certain contaminants because they were not unique to the WTC. Of course they weren't. There's no reason why they would be. The evidence it makes sense to look for is exceedance over background.

The impression left by the May 12 phonecall was that we were in danger of replacing asbestos as a surrogate with glass or a small set of contaminants as a surrogate. But the community never rejected asbestos as a contaminant that needed to be tested for. Indeed I am grateful to Dr. Lippmann who while he was chairing the ATSDR conference in October 02, advised me to remove my carpet which had elevated levels of asbestos. The same advice should no doubt be given to many people who are at this time living in blissful ignorance while their children crawl on contaminated carpets. What we rejected was the notion of surrogacy itself.

Finally, it is crucial that sampling be done right. In January 02 Dr. Cate Jenkins said that EPA had been using 20-year-old methods. "For every asbestos fiber EPA detected, the new methods used by outside experts found nine." An independent company not beholden to EPA must do or supervise the sampling and testing.

(adlibbed post script) On Dr. Chen's presentation and his statements that asbestos was not excessive downtown: The last time I heard this presentation, I asked Dr. Chen about the asbestos readings at Stuyvesant High School: 2.4 million structures per sq cm in the carpet. Dr. Chen replied that that was a spike but that in general asbestos was not a problem. Dr. Chen's statements about P.M. 2.5 downtown are similarly sanguine. But once again they ignore Stuyvesant's readings of P.M. 2.5 which were often higher than at Ground Zero.

I'm concerned that because of the way the contaminants dispersed with antimony over here and lead over there, and something else somewhere else, they'll all be averaged out and made to disappear. It's happened before. I don't want it to happen again.

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