

Clear the air on 9/11 health issue

The [Newark, New Jersey] Star-Ledger

News reports have increasingly focused on the handling of public health issues by the federal government, and Environmental Protection Agency head Christie Whitman in particular, following the destruction of the World Trade Center.

I remember being flabbergasted to see Whitman on TV, immediately after the events of 9/11, insisting that the air at the World Trade Center site (and by extension in the environs) was A-okay. Common sense would suggest otherwise. I called the Department of Environmental Protection and the EPA in the days after 9/11 and was assured that particulates in air samples collected were no different after 9/11 than before—reports that I construed as lies.

Toward noon on Sept. 12, 2001, Westfield [New Jersey], some 20 miles from Manhattan, was enveloped in a stinking miasma. I was forced to take down the clothes I had hung out to dry and place them back in my washing machine to rewash. Outdoor sports activities were canceled by the schools. It's high time the EPA and Whitman be closely interrogated so Americans may learn why this lapse in protecting the public health occurred – an important question the 9/11 commission did not, alas, address.

– Ferdinand Gajewski, Westfield

Too late now

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Former Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christie Whitman is spinning furiously, trying to explain away her unconscionable decision in the immediate wake of the Sept. 11 attacks to announce – erroneously – that the toxic environment at Ground Zero and in Lower Manhattan did not pose a health danger. Or, to quote Whitman from Sept. 18, 2001, “I am glad to reassure the people of New York and Washington, D.C., that their air is safe to breathe.” I assume Whitman is scrambling to salvage her professional and political reputation. My guess is it's too late. The only real question is, how does she sleep at night?

– Eric Boehlert, Montclair