

Protecting Operating Engineers at the World Trade Center Cleanup: Answering the Important Questions

What is the most critical information I should know?

Many of the buildings around the site are still unstable. They are being monitored by structural engineers with laser beams constantly checking for motion. The condition of the slurry wall holding back the water is also being closely monitored. So far, so good. **Three blasts from an air horn warns that a collapse is near. If you hear the warning LEAVE THE AREA IMMEDIATELY! If you think others cannot hear, repeat the three blasts on the horn of your equipment before you evacuate.**

What does OSHA consider to be the main hazards on the site?

OSHA is concerned about workers being struck by trucks and heavy equipment. You can reduce this risk by being doubly careful on picks and when backing up. As you know, there are many more people at the site than on most construction sites and traffic patterns are not well controlled. Operating Engineers can make a real difference in reducing the hazards by taking extra care.

What do we know about the hazards of the dust and smoke?

Air tests are being collected every day by a special team from the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) National Hazmat Program, OSHA, EPA, NIOSH, NY Health Department, and others. Most of the results are quite low. Several of the organizations have reported increased levels of asbestos in the air. The IUOE Hazmat Emergency Management Team has measured small asbestos fibers blowing around in the cabs of equipment on site. The levels are below the OSHA standard but are high enough that members should protect themselves.

The IUOE Hazmat Emergency Management Team has looked at the level of lead in the air during work and found that there is little lead dust blowing around, well below the OSHA standard for construction. The team is continuing to monitor, however, because the dust levels change. Some chemical vapors have been detected but they may be coming from the exhaust of the many pieces of heavy equipment on site. Further tests are being conducted to determine where the vapors are coming from.

Should I wear a respirator?

Yes! The air testing is looking better but it is still too early to say it is safe. OSHA is recommending that respirators be worn when working within 50 feet of the pile. The IUOE Hazmat Emergency Management Team feels that operators should wear their respirators

whenever they are operating equipment at the site. When not operating equipment, operators should stay well away from the pile. The Team is recommending a half-face respirator with combination cartridges that protect against dust, vapors, and acid gases. This is marked P100/OV/AG.

Where can I get a respirator?

The IUOE National Hazmat Program has a trailer stationed onsite at Murray and West Street to serve you. We have three different brands of respirators with plenty of cartridges. The Team can fit test you for the respirator there to be sure it fits snugly on your face. There are disposable suits, safety glasses, hearing protection, cold drinks, and health and safety experts to talk to as well.



What other steps should I take to protect myself?

1. Avoid picking up damaged automobiles with grapplers. The cars may contain gasoline that can ignite from a spark during handling. Someone should determine the quantity of gasoline in the vehicle.
2. Do not eat and drink near the pile. There are many places serving food away from the cleanup effort.
3. Take advantage of the hand washing station near you to be sure you have thoroughly removed the grime at the end of the day.
4. Use the boot washing station to prevent dragging dust into your car and home. The dust on the site has been shown to contain lead, which is particularly harmful to young children.

The IUOE is working hard to support your important efforts for the citizens of New York and this country. Operating Engineers are making a major contribution. Let's do it safely.