

Lung Disease in the Shadow of 9/11

By Bill Hawthorne

While many understood and felt the immediate impacts of September 11th, 2001, few understand the lasting health impacts of that fateful day. Indeed, while many were killed or injured in the terrorist attacks, there were also myriad sustained health complications caused by the events that day. Among these is a chronic breathing condition known as the World Trade Center cough.

First responders, police, and paramedics breathed in the billowing dust and rubble from the attack, many of whom have developed more serious health complications as a result of this cough. Among the diseases found in World Trade Center first responders was mesothelioma, a fatal cancer of the lung's pleural lining. Mesothelioma is known to be caused only by asbestos exposure. On that autumn day, nearly nine tons of asbestos fibers were released into the air supply and the World Trade Center dust. This dust, and these asbestos fibers were inhaled by thousands who were on the scene. Some have already died from respiratory complications due inhalation of this dust.

Many more may ultimately suffer the same fate, as asbestos-related health complications can take dozens of years to manifest in the body. Asbestos fibers are a natural mineral fiber. They are microscopic and easily inhaled when in the air supply. Once in the body, the fibers are extremely durable and the body is unable to break them down or expel them. They become lodged in the outer tissue or the body's organs and, over time, cause a sustained inflammation of this tissue. This lays the groundwork for mesothelioma, asbestosis (chronic disease of the lungs tissue caused by exposure to asbestos), and other respiratory conditions.

Those who may be affected include not only first responders, but also those who were on the scene or in the vicinity of Ground Zero on September 11th or in the following days. If you think your health was compromised by the World Trade center dust, you should consult with your physician about possible causes and how to obtain treatments. There are also many clinical trials among those who are experiencing respiratory symptoms related to 9/11.