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PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SUBJECT: Volunteers encouraged to wear masks during debris removal phase

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As debris cleanup from the May 22nd tornado continues, the possibility exists for dust and particulates to become airborne.

Responders, volunteers and citizens in the field are advised to be conscious of dust and particulates as the next stage of debris removal gets underway.

The EPA has been scientifically monitoring air quality in the debris field since Saturday. The tests are monitoring for asbestos and other potentially harmful particulates, including dust, and are standard practice in debris situations such as this.

Tests show particulate levels are normal thus far and are not approaching any level of concern. No asbestos has been found.

Testing is being conducted daily at six ground-level sites in the debris field. Temporary, roving testing stations will be installed where debris collection is taking place as those operations continue. Dust and particulate testing yields immediate results, however, asbestos test results take approximately 48 hours to be processed from the time of collection.

EPA uses a very proactive approach in advising responders, volunteers and citizens when it comes to potential health issues. For that reason, N95 masks and safety instructions are being provided to registered volunteers as a precautionary measure.

A common sense approach is advised for anyone in the debris field.

“If it’s dusty enough that you can visibly see dust coming at you, you should wear the masks that have been provided as a precaution,” said Eric Nold, Federal On-Scene Coordinator with EPA Region 7.

For citizens who do not have a mask, masks are being provided at the Duquesne City Hall and out in the field at various distribution centers. The masks are also available in many stores. They include a respirator component and are of a higher quality than the standard masks used for painting.