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Commissioner

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Christie Administration Reminds Everyone Involved in Sandy Cleanup and Repair to Take Steps to Protect Themselves

As Hurricane Sandy recovery and cleanup continues, Health Commissioner Mary E. O'Dowd cautions community volunteers, homeowners, business owners, contractors and other recovery workers to protect their health by wearing gloves, masks, boots, protective eyewear and respirators.

"Rebuilding or repairing your home or business can be hazardous to your health-especially if repair work is not something you do on a regular basis," said Commissioner O'Dowd. "Along with the physical hazards that can occur during reconstruction, people need to be aware that exposure to mold or asbestos are health risks."

Mold is common in homes and businesses damaged by Hurricane Sandy. To determine if mold is present in a home or business, examine the walls, ceilings and floors for signs of water damage. Mold can also be recognized by a musty, earthy smell or foul stench.

Exposure to mold can cause nasal and throat irritation, coughing or wheezing, eye irritation, or, in some cases, skin irritation. People with mold allergies may have more severe reactions. Immune-compromised people and individuals with chronic lung illnesses, such as obstructive lung disease, may get serious infections in their lungs when they are exposed to mold.

"Community volunteers, homeowners, business owners, first responders, recovery workers and contractors and their employees should take steps to protect themselves from injury and or illness while doing repair work," Commissioner O'Dowd said. "If you are working to cleanup and repair homes and businesses you should wear gloves, masks, protective eye wear and boots. You should also get a tetanus booster."

Individuals should also wear an appropriate respirator, wash hands and other areas of the skin that come in contact with debris and take frequent breaks and remain hydrated.

The Department has developed a brochure for volunteers, community organizations, and home and businesses owners on how to identify mold and asbestos; and steps that can be taken to protect against these health hazards. The flyer is available at:
http://www.state.nj.us/health/er/documents/prepare_before_cleanup_flyer.pdf

Additional tips for remaining safe while doing repairs:

- *Do not enter a building if it is unstable or there are potential hazards
- *Do not mix any chemicals together
- *Avoid contact with flood water, silt or mud that may contain organic chemicals, pesticides or raw sewage
- *Do not apply chemicals to surfaces to kill mold and bacteria without wearing gloves, masks, protective eye wear and boots

If mold is identified, the following preventive steps should be taken while cleaning:

- *Open windows and doors when you use bleach
- *Mix no more than 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water
- *After disposing of moldy sheet rock and insulation, wash the remaining wall with bleach and water, then rinse with clean water and let the area dry
- *Never mix bleach with ammonia or other cleaners
- *Scrub mold off hard surfaces with laundry or dish detergent and water, and dry completely so mold does not grow back

Another health hazard recovery workers need to be aware of is asbestos. Asbestos is extremely hazardous. Even small amounts of asbestos can cause serious illness or death years after exposure. Asbestos is a common building material so everyone who is removing walls or other parts of homes damaged by Hurricane Sandy should be cautious and determine if asbestos is present prior to removal.

Asbestos fibers may be released into the air by the disturbance of asbestos-containing material during demolition work, building or home maintenance, repair and remodeling. In general, exposure may occur only when the asbestos-containing material is disturbed or damaged in some way to release particles and fibers into the air.

To find out if a home contains asbestos, homeowners should contract with a professional asbestos inspector certified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to conduct an inspection and take samples of any suspect asbestos-containing material.

Removal of any asbestos, or demolition of a home that potentially contains asbestos, must be done in accordance with local, state, and federal rules.

Information about disposing of asbestos-containing material is available at www.state.nj.us/health/iep/documents/asbestos_disposing_by_sandy.pdf.

Homeowners or businesses with questions about mold or asbestos should contact the Department's Consumer, Environmental and Occupational Health Service Office at 609-826-4920 or 4950.

Additional health and safety resources are available to assist people in their cleanup efforts:
http://www.nj.gov/health/er/hurricane_recovery_resources.shtml.
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/cleanup/facts.asp>.

Mold resources are available at:
<http://www.nj.gov/health/er/documents/get-rid-of-mold-eng.pdf>
<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp>

Information on asbestos is available by visiting:
http://www.state.nj.us/health/iep/documents/asb_in_home.pdf
<http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/learn-about-asbestos.html#find>
"Be Sure to Prepare Before Clean-up and Repair" flyer on mold and asbestos