



THE BIG PICTURE

Health effects of 9/11 terror attacks continue to grow

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The BMJ



[Image: Alex Camacho/Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images]

Some 15 years after the terrorist attack on New York on 11 September 2001, at least 1000 people, including many emergency responders, are known to have died from illnesses related to their exposure to toxic dust, and 37 000 people are officially recognised as sick.

In the next five years, the death toll from health problems related to the New York attacks is likely to exceed the 2753 deaths on the day that two hijacked passenger jets were flown into the

twin towers of the World Trade Center, according to Jim Melius, a doctor who also advises the White House on worker health and chairs the steering committee overseeing the US government's health programme for 9/11 responders.

"There are a lot of people who are very, very ill with lung disease who will see at least 10 years taken from their normal life span," he told the *Guardian*. "We are already seeing many more premature deaths occurring, and among younger people, from the cancers."

The dust and debris around the World Trade Center contained asbestos, lead, glass, heavy metals, concrete, and poisonous gases as well as exploding jet fuel and fragments of dead bodies.

The World Trade Center Health Program provides monitoring and treatment for a list of conditions that are officially recognised as 9/11 related, including airway and digestive disorders, mental health conditions, musculoskeletal disorders, and cancers (www.cdc.gov/wtc/conditions.html).

This year, Christine Todd Whitman, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency in 2001, admitted for the first time that she was wrong to assure people after the attack that the air was safe.

"We did the very best we could at the time with the knowledge we had," she said.