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Maine-made unit to test for air pollutants near WTC site

By Associated Press

SANFORD, Maine - A Maine-made mobile air quality monitor will help New York City get a handle on the extent of air pollution in neighborhoods near the site of the World Trade Center.

The \$250,000 unit, which is more than 12 feet tall and resembles a television news truck, was built by Sanford-based Ekto for the Center for Biology of Natural Systems of Queens College, City University of New York, which is embarking on a study of air quality and asthma.

It also will spend some time in Battery Park, to determine whether there are still airborne pollutants from the collapse of the Twin Towers following the Sept. 11 attacks.

"There is an issue of particles sitting on the ground from moving the debris," said Holger Eisl, who is with the university. "And stuff is still flying around. We have never experienced anything like Sept. 11. We want to know what happens. Is the air really acceptable? Is it clean? Is there reason for concern?"

Ekto has been making air quality monitors since 1973 and has about 5,000 units stationed around the world.

"For a small place like us to be involved with the disaster, everybody here felt very proud," said Willy Faessler, vice president of engineering at Ekto.

Karl Epper, who heads the company, said it was a complex unit to create, because it will house a lot of sensitive equipment to measure the most difficult to measure and most dangerous pollutants.

When the "Asthma Watch" vehicle goes into operation in July, it will be placed in different areas throughout New York City, not just around the Twin Towers site.

The main purpose of the unit is to better address the connection between air pollution and health problems, especially asthma in children, Eisl said.

"We believe there is a link between air quality pollutants and asthma," he said.

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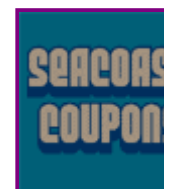
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