THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

FEB 27 2006

The Honorable Vito Fossella
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Fossella:

Thank you for writing to me regarding concern about the reported deaths and health complications of 9/11 responders, possibly related to their World Trade Center (WTC) exposures. I appreciate the time you took to write.

HHS remains committed to assuring the men and women who served at the WTC disaster continue to be monitored for any ill effects. We have taken a number of steps toward this goal through screening and examinations of workers and volunteers involved in Ground Zero rescue and cleanup efforts, as well as through the World Trade Center Health Registry.

I agree there is a critical need to ensure that programs addressing the health of WTC responders and nearby residents are well-coordinated, and I have asked Dr. John Howard, Director of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to play the lead role in this effort. As you may know, Dr. Howard will testify before the House Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations on Tuesday, February 28, to discuss the status of HHS efforts in this area, and we will provide you with a copy of his testimony as soon as possible.

Rest assured that HHS is committed to providing appropriate, compassionate and timely support to those who were affected by WTC exposures following the 9/11 attack. Thank you again for contacting me about this important public health issue. I also will provide this response to the other Members of Congress who co-signed your letter.

Sincerely,

Michael O. Leavitt