



WTC BOMBSHELL

By **SUSAN EDELMAN** and **DAN MANGAN**

September 18, 2006 -- Christie Todd Whitman, while head of the federal EPA, "conspired" to falsely reassure the public that the air around Ground Zero was safe to breath, according to critics and bombshell new documents.

In 2003, Whitman's then-spokeswoman, Tina Kreisher, was asked by an Environmental Protection Agency internal investigator "whether there was a conscious effort to reassure the public [in the fall of 2001].

"Ms. Kreisher said there was such an effort. This emphasis 'came from the administrator [Whitman] and the White House,' " according to newly released quotes from EPA papers.

Hugh Kaufman, an EPA senior policy analyst, told The Post yesterday, that Kreisher "blew the whistle not just on the White House, but on Whitman as well,"

Kreisher's comment was included in the investigator's notes made during the interview with her. But her quote was not released in the EPA inspector general's final report in 2003, which blamed the White House - not Whitman - for telling the EPA to publicly play up reassuring information and downplay concerns about air around Ground Zero.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-Manhattan) blasted Whitman over the new disclosure.

"She conspired [with the White House] to convince people to go into an unsafe environment . . . For that, she ought to be prosecuted," Nadler said. "People are dead because of her."

Whitman's current spokeswoman responded by sending The Post a statement that her boss had recently released on the controversy over air quality.

"We agreed then, and I reiterate now, that the air on the site was not clean," Whitman said.

"We were emphatic that workers needed to wear respirators, a message that I repeated frequently. But I did not have the jurisdiction to force workers to wear them."

Meanwhile, Whitman's newly released financial-disclosure forms show that she said seven months before 9/11 that she would not get involved in any issue related to the finances of the Port Authority - which owns the WTC site - because she or her family owned PA bonds. Its finances could be impacted by lawsuits growing of the cleanup.

"I understand the following interests that belong to me, my spouse or my children present a conflict of interest," Whitman wrote at the time. She then listed various investments, including the bistate agency.

But Whitman was involved at Ground Zero despite that recusal, although she or her family also owned shares of Citigroup, whose insurance-company subsidiary, The Travelers, paid out hundred of millions of dollars in claims to downtown residents displaced by the attacks.

Critics said the documents indicate Whitman encouraged people to move back to near Ground Zero and

work on the cleanup despite a health threat, which could have bolstered the bottom line of both the PA and Travelers.

That's because both the PA and Travelers now can argue in civil suits that they believed there was little or no danger from the air around the Trade Center based on statements made by the EPA.

David Worby, who represents 8,000 workers at and around Ground Zero, said, "The fact that the head of the EPA had a financial conflict defies imagination."

Whitman's camp pointed out that she previously had been cleared by the EPA's inspector general on conflict-of-interest accusations.

susan.edelman@nypost.com

Home

NEW YORK POST is a registered trademark of NYP Holdings, Inc. NYPOST.COM, NYPOSTONLINE.COM, and NEWYORKPOST.COM are trademarks of NYP Holdings, Inc. Copyright 2006 NYP Holdings, Inc. All rights reserved.