

9/11 VICTIMS REGISTER FOR HEALTH FUND

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Jack Delaney of Bethpage was one of the first.

On Monday, the first day that the new 9/11 victim compensation fund was open for business, 117 people registered online to begin the process of filing their claims, according to the Justice Department. Another 45 began the registration process, the department said.

"I figured let's get it over with and done," Delaney said yesterday. He is a retired director of emergency medical services at a hospital.

Delaney, 55, who hurt his shoulder on 9/11 and has since suffered from respiratory and intestinal ailments he attributes to 12 weeks of work at the site, said he actually left the registration to his lawyer, Troy Rosasco of Turley, Redmond, Rosasco & Rosasco. Rosasco said his firm was in the process of registering more than 400 clients who say they were injured in rescue, recovery or cleanup at the World Trade Center site.

Registration online is the first — and, according to Special Master Sheila Birnbaum, not required — step in the process of qualifying for compensation from the \$2.77 billion fund authorized under the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act enacted in January. Under the newly reopened fund, ailing first responders, cleanup workers and residents from Canal Street south can apply for compensation.

Birnbaum said thousands might be eligible, "but we don't know how many." By the end of the month the eligibility part of the claims form will be available, she said. If found eligible, claimants will complete a compensation form to determine the amount they will be given.

Birnbaum said the purpose of registering was to establish communication and begin the process. "They don't have to register. But the good part of registration is that they will be given any new information as it comes out," she said.

The special master said she had worked hard to make the process "user friendly" and that lawyers from the New York City Bar Association would be offering free help at clinics.

But some responders and lawyers said most people would have a hard time filling out the forms without a lawyer and that requirements to prove the claimant was at the site could be difficult to fulfill 10 years later. "It will weed out the phonies," said Glen Klein of Centereach, a retired NYPD detective and first responder. "But a lot of people who were there could end up losing out."

For more information, go to vcf.gov or call 855-885-1555.