



9/11: Ground Zero proved health hazard for rescuers

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9/11 REPERCUSSIONS: People feel New York authorities' efforts to get immunity on grounds of 9/11 being an emergency are unfair.

New Delhi: When Former New York City Police officer Richard Volpe visits Ground Zero, he feels proud of his recovery work after 9/11. But he's also frustrated by the heavy price he paid. His kidneys are failing and he will eventually need a kidney transplant.

"I think from the beginning the actual site could have been secured a lot better," says he.

Volpe's former NYPD partner, John Walcott, too fell seriously sick, soon after spending more than six months at Ground Zero and at Staten Island's Fresh Kills landfill, where 9/11 debris was sorted.

Walcott is currently in remission from a severe form of leukemia and says his doctors believe his cancer was linked to his exposure to benzene at these sites.

"It's frustrating to know that back then you didn't know anything, you just went to help people. Now that you find out, you read that they knew the air was bad and they still sent you in there. It's one thing if you thought

lives could still be saved, but once they understood that there were no more survivors, I believe that they should have taken the proper precautions for the safety of everybody there," says Walcott.

Walcott and Volpe are among the 10,000 New Yorkers to file one of the biggest health related lawsuits against the city for failing to safeguard their health from toxins, and for not compensating them for mounting medical bills.

Lawyer David Worby says the city's efforts to get immunity on grounds of 9/11 being an emergency, are unfair.

"Even if the city wasn't negligent and these people got sick because they weren't given respirators and it's no one's fault. How do you not compensate firemen and cops, construction workers who went down there to help America, and who are sick and dying today, especially when there's a fund set aside for that purpose. It's very sad," says Worby.

As several medical lawsuits weave their way slowly through the courts and new health impact studies keep emerging, New York City is facing the pressure.