

Home > [World](#)

## Six years after 9/11, New York City fails to help many exposed with toxin



New York, Sept 11: Six years after 9/11, the commemoration of victims of the tragedy is often overshadowed by the medical problems faced by those who were exposed to the World Trade Center site. And as several medical lawsuits weave their way slowly through the courts and new health impact studies keep emerging, New York City is facing increasing pressure to do more to help those who claim they fell sick because of exposure to WTC toxins.

When Former New York City Police officer Richard Volpe visits Ground Zero now, he feels proud of his recovery work here after 9/11. But he's also frustrated by the heavy price he paid for doing his duty. His kidneys are failing and he will eventually need a kidney transplant. He says his doctors are 100% sure that his health issues are linked to 9/11 because his disease usually does not come to people that are less than 60 or 70 years old, and also because he lost over 50% of kidney function in less than a year's time.

"I don't hear of that I know of any illnesses from the site in Washington. I mean they sealed the whole site off, everybody that was in there had proper respirators and they had the tie back suits, and it seems like nobody got sick from there, and here at the World Trade Center where the toxins were probably a million times worse than there, they didn't take any of those preventions," said Volpe on one visit to Ground Zero.

Volpe says the City has done little to help him or his former NYPD partner, John Walcott, who 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. Both former police officers are convinced that their serious illnesses could have been prevented if city agencies had taken adequate precautions for workers at these sites.

"Now that you find out, you read that they knew the air was bad and they still sent you in there, its 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 to safety of everybody there," said Walcott.

In 2004, Walcott in fact was one of the first WTC recovery workers to file a lawsuit against the city and agencies involved in the clean up, for failing to adequately safeguard his health from toxins at Ground Zero and Fresh Kills landfill, and for not compensating him for his mounting medical bills. Volpe too joined the lawsuit soon after and today they are about 10,000 New Yorkers -- mostly firemen, construction workers and fire personnel -- who are part of what has now become one of the biggest health related class action lawsuits against the city.

The lawyer on this case is David Worby who says that the city's efforts to get immunity from lawsuits on the grounds of 9/11 being an emergency are unfair. He believes that while September 11, 2001 can be counted as an emergency, the days and months after the attack when recovery work was undertaken, cannot be called an emergency period and thereby the city must compensate those who fell ill because of the lack of adequate safety guidelines.

A day before the sixth anniversary, at the WTC site, Discover Magazine held a news conference along with New York City political leaders like Democrat New York Representative Carolyn Maloney, to address the very issues also raised by Walcott, Volpe and Worby. They highlighted a new report, called "The 9/11 Cover-up," which brings to light the health risks posed by the Environmental Protection Agency's alleged mishandling of the 9/11 cleanup.

"On 9/11, three thousand people lost their lives, many thousands more lost their health. We provided compensation for the innocent Americans who lost their lives, but not for the men and women who ran in to protect and try and save them, who then became sick, or died as a result," said Maloney.

She called for legislation to provide health coverage and financial compensation to responders who get sick from exposure to toxins at Gound Zero. It is a move that is also supported by speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, who also visited the WTC site the same day.

Bureau Report

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