



WORKERS BATTLE FOR 9/11 SUIT

By CARL CAMPANILE

June 22, 2006 -- World Trade Center rescue and recovery workers who say they got sick breathing toxic air from Ground Zero want a federal judge to reject the city's claim that dismissing their class-action case would be in the national interest.

About 8,000 plaintiffs - including many cops, firefighters and EMTs - will ask Manhattan federal Judge Alvin Hellerstein today to allow a jury hear their argument that the city failed to protect them from the hazardous smoke, dust and debris.

But city lawyers are playing hardball.

They argue that in a national catastrophe, the city has blanket immunity under federal law.

"Imposition of liability in these circumstances would harm the interests of the United States," the city said in court papers.

Ailing workers and their families are furious.

"They're absolutely heartless. It's disgusting," said plaintiff Eileen Weintraub, whose cop husband, Ronald, died of bile-duct cancer in November.

Since the attack, 283 WTC workers have been diagnosed with cancer, and 33 of them have died.

"The city put Wall Street first and the safety of cops, firefighters and volunteers a distant second," said lawyer David Worby, representing the workers.

But Kenneth Becker of the city Law Department said "the city did everything reasonably possible under the extraordinary circumstances following the attacks to protect the health and safety of the brave firefighters, police officers and others who took part in the rescue and recovery."

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