

NY1 News

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The Year At The World Trade Center Site: Health Concerns Plague 9/11 First Responders

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As we wind down 2006, NY1 continues to [look back on the year that was](#). It has been five years since the attacks on the World Trade Center but for many who responded to help there, the health problems are just beginning. NY1's Rebecca Spitz looks at these health issues that characterized 2006.

A staggering 70-percent of World Trade Center first responders are suffering from respiratory problems. In September, Mount Sinai Hospital released a groundbreaking study on the health of the firefighters, police officers, construction, and transit workers who responded to the terror attacks.

"I have burnt lungs," said WTC responder John Graham. "I have asthma, reactive airway disease, gastric reflux, post-traumatic stress and a host of other things."

One of the more striking findings was that among those who had no health problems before September 11th, 2001, 61-percent developed symptoms after exposure.

"There should no longer be any doubt about the health effects of the World Trade Center," said Dr. Robin Herbert of Mount Sinai. "Our patients are sick and will need on-going health monitoring and treatment for the rest of their lives."

Mayor Michael Bloomberg said it was too soon to draw that conclusion. Still, the city opened an environmental health center at Bellevue Hospital for those first responders and anyone who felt they were suffering from the effects of the dust they inhaled after the attacks.

And the state government also did its part to contribute to the health of 9/11 first responders. Earlier, Governor George Pataki signed legislation giving full line of duty benefits to the family of any firefighter, police officer, or uniformed person who dies of a 9/11-related illness.

"We asked a great deal of our heroes after the horrible attacks, and they gave without asking anything back," said Pataki. "Now it's our turn."

But the fallout from the attacks continued, this time in court, as more than 8,000 workers were represented in a federal lawsuit that alleges the city failed to properly protect them from toxic dust and debris after the terror attacks.

The plaintiffs include police officers, firefighters, and EMTs.

"Yesterday I got a phone call from an electrician whose husband died of stomach cancer," explained the plaintiffs' attorney, David Worby. "And three days earlier we got another call from a relative of someone who died from throat and tongue cancer. Those people were given zero protection."

The city's attorneys countered the city and the contractors it hired did everything they could to provide air-filtering masks and instructions on how to use them.

Meanwhile, the Environmental Protection Agency planned to resume cleaning up toxins around the World Trade Center site. As part of a new \$7 million plan, residents and building owners south of Canal Street and West of Allen and Pike Streets can have their air and dust tested for toxins, which the EPA will then clean up.

The plan is getting a thumbs-down from local lawmakers though. Congressman Jerry Nadler and Senator Hillary Clinton blast the program, calling it inadequate. But the EPA is pushing ahead, advertising a two-month

registration program to begin in January.

- *Rebecca Spitz*

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