

Statement of Marilena Christodoulou
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Member, 9/11 Environmental Action
Before the
World Trade Center Technical Expert Panel
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Stuyvesant High School is located four blocks north of the World Trade Center (WTC). On September 11, 2001, the 3,000 students and 200 staff members were evacuated in the middle of a cloud of toxic dust and debris as the second tower was collapsing.

The Board of Education (BOE) reopened the school on October 9. We sent our children back to school in good faith based on specific assurances from the BOE and the NYC Department of Health (DOH) that the inside of the building was completely clean, including all aspects of its heating and ventilation systems, and that the air quality immediately outside of Stuyvesant was at safe acceptable levels for children.

Unfortunately, neither of these representations proved to be true. The various Government agencies in charge of protecting the environment and public health (including the EPA and DOH) failed to take the necessary measures to protect our children. Public officials, including some on this panel, continuously misrepresented the situation to us. Although field representatives of the EPA were originally at Stuyvesant during the weeks leading to the school's reopening, they provided no assistance of any sort to our community (they actually "disappeared" after October 9), and we were left to our own devices to battle with the BOE and other Government agencies.

The BOE conducted an asbestos abatement of the school prior to reoccupancy, but the ventilation system was not cleaned, filtration was not adequately upgraded, and carpeting was not properly cleaned or replaced. Only under the threat of imminent litigation, did the BOE finally clean the ventilation system in the summer of 2002 and replaced the carpets this past December 2003, 26 months after our children's return to school post-9/11.

A major problem was the location of the waste transfer barge operation right next to Stuyvesant, by the school's ventilation intakes, on Pier 25. This was the main debris removal operation from Ground Zero. For 8 months, several hundred trucks a day carried pulverized debris from Ground Zero, with whatever toxic contaminants were in the debris, to the barges. Diesel emissions from the trucks and cranes at the barges were another source of contaminants.

Our experience at Stuyvesant is of the utmost importance in your consideration of several key issues in the WTC environmental cleanup:

1. **The arbitrary exclusion of schools and workplaces from the cleanup.**
There are no legal or scientific reasons to exclude schools or workplaces. All buildings should be included.
2. **The evaluation of the incidence of recontamination of buildings already cleaned by the EPA or others.** Stuyvesant was recontaminated.
3. **The appropriateness of the use of asbestos as a surrogate for evaluating the risk from other WTC contaminants.** The Stuyvesant experience proved that asbestos is not a sufficient surrogate.

4. **Health monitoring and identification of unmet public health needs.** To-date, health monitoring has been grossly inadequate. The health needs of affected children and students have been ignored.

After the original asbestos abatement at Stuyvesant in October 2001, daily environmental testing performed by the BOE demonstrated recontamination primarily through the ventilation systems. On more than 50% of the days from October 9, 2001, when our children returned to school, to February 1, 2002, and as late as May 2002, measurements of respirable particulate matter (PM 2.5) inside the school exceeded EPA guidelines for children. Levels of lead dust in excess of regulatory limits were found inside Stuyvesant on several occasions in December 2001 and January and February 2002.

On several occasions, the EPA notified the Parents Association (PA) that it had monitored high levels of certain contaminants in outdoor air at its monitoring station, between the school and the barge, in excess of EPA regulatory limits. These contaminants included asbestos, tetrachloroethane, and isocyanate. Unfortunately, the EPA had not been monitoring the latter contaminants on a regular basis nor was it monitoring and disclosing the full array of possible contaminants in indoor air. Consequently, we have no way of knowing if these or other contaminants are present inside the school.

In the Spring of 2002, under threat of litigation, the BOE tested inside the school's ventilation systems and found high levels of lead, at 30 times regulatory levels for floors. The school had to be shut down during the summer of 2002 and a lead abatement of the mechanical ventilation systems was done. In July 2002, despite the original asbestos abatement 9 months earlier, asbestos in excess of EPA's regulatory levels was found in the carpets and seats in the school's auditorium. All test results have been provided to the EPA.

The above clearly demonstrates the recontamination of the school, primarily through its ventilation systems, and the inadequacy of asbestos as a surrogate measure for other WTC contaminants.

As to health issues, since the return to school on October 9, 2001, a number of students and faculty reported and exhibited clinically diagnosable symptoms of illness (unusual rashes, nosebleeds, coughing attacks, and chronic sinus and respiratory problems, including new onset asthma and chemical bronchitis).

After the Teacher's Union filed a grievance over post-September 11 environmental conditions at the school, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), a branch of the Centers for Disease Control, conducted an investigation of environmental conditions and health effects among the staff at Stuyvesant (and other Lower Manhattan locations). NIOSH's preliminary findings were that 50-60% of the staff reported respiratory symptoms after 9/11, a majority of which were new onset symptoms. 33% of the staff had continuing symptoms months later. However, NIOSH has no jurisdiction to conduct an evaluation of our children and neither the BOE nor the DOH conducted an epidemiological study of the Stuyvesant students. An informal survey of parents by the PA found several hundred children with new or exacerbated respiratory symptoms several months after September 11. Of the 430 respondents, about two-thirds indicated new incidence of illness since the return to school in October 2001.

It should also be noted that the NIOSH study was never finalized and no actions were taken as a result of the preliminary study.

I urge all of you to finally do the right thing.

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