



## 9/11 HEROES IN TOXIC CLOUD

By **CARL CAMPANILE** and **DAVID SEIFMAN**

*September 6, 2006* -- A staggering 70 percent of emergency workers at Ground Zero developed new or worsening respiratory problems from breathing highly toxic air, according to a grim health study announced yesterday.

Mount Sinai Medical Center doctors - who said the study provides conclusive proof that the WTC site caused illnesses - also found 61 percent of first responders and cleanup workers had no health problems before 9/11 and became ill after working downtown.

Another 9 percent had pre-existing health ailments - such as asthma - but became sicker from working at or near the collapsed trade centers.

One-third had "abnormal" lung capacity - more than double the national rate. And the number of workers who came down with pneumonia also increased significantly, the report said.

Mount Sinai officials called the findings grim, and predicted that many workers will struggle with lifetimes illnesses.

Some will likely develop deadly lung diseases like asbestosis.

"There should no longer be any doubt about the health effects of the World Trade Center. Our patients are sick," said Dr. Robin Herbert, co-director of the hospital's unit that has monitored and treated 16,000 responders.

"Our patients are very, very highly exposed, and are likely to suffer health consequences for the rest of their lives."

The persistent respiratory illnesses - and expected wave of cancers in the years to come - should come as no surprise, said Philip Landrigan, Mount Sinai's head of community and preventive medicine.

"What these people inhaled was extremely toxic. It was pulverized dust. It was like Drano. It penetrated deep in the lungs, deep in the sinus cavities," he said, adding that that "trillions upon trillions of shards of glass" were also ingested.

"It's very logical to project long-term disease," he added.

Mount Sinai is now tracking cancer and other diseases that develop among workers.

The Mount Sinai study comes on the heels of mounting criticism that city, state and federal politicians haven't done enough to treat and provide medical coverage to sick Ground Zero workers.

The press event at Mount Sinai took on a politicized tone.

Sitting on the dais during the release of the scientific findings were Sen. Hillary Clinton, and Reps. Carolyn Maloney and Jerrold Nadler - all Democrats and frequent critics of the White House.

Yesterday, they all teed off on the Bush administration for resisting helping 9/11 "heroes" and for saying the air was safe shortly after the attacks.

"It was obvious that the air was hard to see through, let alone hard to breathe," Clinton said. "Our government was not telling us the truth."

John Howard, the Bush administration's 9/11 health czar, was also present.

He didn't respond to the attacks against the administration, but called the findings "extremely important."

At City Hall, Mayor Bloomberg announced yesterday that he's allocating \$37.5 million over five years to help World Trade Center responders deal with their health problems - although he questioned the link between Ground Zero air and illnesses.

"I haven't seen the study. But I don't believe you can say specifically a particular problem came from this particular [thing]," the mayor said.

Bloomberg provided \$16 million to expand a WTC treatment program at Bellevue Hospital that was established in August 2005 with a \$2.4 million, two-year grant from the American Red Cross.

Officials said the added funds would allow the program - which has a one- to two-month backlog for routine appointments - to treat 6,000 patients for free over five years.

Bloomberg also set aside \$21.6 million so the Health Department could increase the unit assigned to investigate WTC health issues from seven to 20 employees.

But the mayor insisted his actions - coming just days before the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attack - weren't an admission that more should have been done earlier.

"A lot of data is just coming, in terms of damage or symptoms that people have," Bloomberg said.

Lawyers representing 6,000 sick workers in a class-action suit against the city said Mount Sinai and City Hall are years behind the curve in diagnosing how sick people are.

The plaintiffs' legal team claims that nearly 400 Ground Zero workers have cancer and more than 50 others have died from WTC-related illnesses.

"I have clients with kidney disease, leukemia, liver disease. The people are getting sicker," said lawyer David Worby.

"They're tracking people with a cough. I'm tracking people who are dying."

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