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From: jonathan bennett [jbennett@nycosh.org]
Sent: Saturday, March 16, 2002 12:18 PM
To: undisclosed-recipients
Subject: Puzzles about toxic hazard reporting

A couple of journalistic puzzles to ponder this weekend:

Below is a story from the 3/16 Times, reporting that St. Paul's Chapel, which is right across the street from the World Trade Center, will be closing after Easter "for cleanup of debris."

The article include some hints about the nature of those debris, reporting that "the cleanup project is mandated by the city's Department of Environmental Protection" and "preservationists have said they fear the fine dust covering the church may contain toxic substances and could eventually damage it."

The report includes nothing more about the nature of those toxic substances or the specifics of the DEP's decision to mandate the cleanup. I don't have any more information about the specifics, either, but I do know that one of the laws under which the DEP can order a clean up is the City's asbestos control law, and I also know that three-quarters of the samples of dust from the trade center collapse contain asbestos, so I wonder whether the clean-up was triggered by asbestos contamination. I don't know, but it does not appear that the Times even asked, being more concerned, evidently, about potential damage to the church structure.

The second puzzle is this: Yesterday the City announced that it was postponing the planned 3/18 of the asbestos-contaminated WTC cars. The decision was reported by Nina Penada on Channnel 7 and by Julie Scelfo on Newsweek Online (<http://www.msnbc.com/news/724974.asp>), and I understand that WNYC Radio will air a report on the morning of 3/18. I'm completely flabbergasted by the absence of any coverage of the postponement by the Daily News, because the News could take legitimate credit for having set in motion the postponement by publishing, on 3/8, an exclusive report of the City's plan to go ahead with the release, a report that played up how controversial the release was (http://www.nydailynews.com/2002-03-08/News_and_Views/City_Beat/a-143745.asp). The News' report was even cited in a 3/14 from Rep. Jerrold Nadler to Christine Whitman, in which Nadler demanded that the release be postponed, which is exactly what happened. The New could have had an exclusive about Nadler's letter to Whitman, because the News had a copy of Nadler's letter to Whitman on the day the letter was written. Does anyone know why the News has had a sudden attack of modesty?

St. Paul's Chapel Is Closing for Cleanup of Debris

By TINA KELLEY
 New York Times
 March 16, 2002

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/16/nyregion/16CHAP.html>

St. Paul's Chapel of Trinity Church, the sanctuary for weary rescue workers at ground zero since Sept. 11, is closing temporarily for a cleaning.

"There has been lots of wear and tear on the building, and it's just in need of a huge cleaning now, both inside and out," the Rev. Lyndon F. Harris said yesterday. "There is some debris outside the church that is of significant concern."

With five big grills set up on the sidewalk, the Episcopal chapel, located at Broadway and Fulton Street, has served about 2,000 meals a day, starting the weekend after Sept. 11, Mr. Harris said. He estimated that 350,000 meals had been served there. The 236-year-old building has been open around the clock to provide food and rest for firefighters, police officers and rescue workers.

The church has held a noontime service just for rescue workers, and, for the past two months, an 8 a.m. Sunday service open to the public. Daily public prayer services are expected to begin again in May.

The cleaning will begin after Easter, Mr. Harris said. He did not know how long it would last or how much it would cost. Preservationists have said they fear the fine dust covering the church may contain toxic substances and could eventually damage it. According to the chapel's Web site, the cleanup project is mandated by the city's Department of Environmental Protection.

"After Easter and the required cleaning, St. Paul's public ministry will be reborn to address the urgent, unique spiritual needs of a community that is recovering but still grieving from the terrible tragedy," said the Rev. Samuel Johnson Howard, the vicar of Trinity Parish.

Nathan Brockman, a spokesman for the chapel, said of the closing: "It was a terribly difficult decision. Unfortunately, we were at the point where we had to make it."

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