

Bob Austin

NEW YORK CITY

Questioning Air Quality Downtown

THE TERRORIST ATTACKS ON the World Trade Center caused an unprecedented environmental assault on Lower Manhattan. More than 1.5 million tons of building materials collapsed to the ground that day, containing dust, glass, powdered cement and toxic gases released from burning computers and electrical equipment. As a result, an acrid smoke engulfed the city, lingering for months and irritating the lungs, throats and eyes of workers and residents alike.



Questions remain over the clean-up of 90 West Street (shown) and more than 200 other buildings.

A year later, questions linger about the adequacy of the clean-up efforts. On May 8, the Environmental Protection Agency announced a program of pollution testing and clean-up for residences south of Canal Street. This was a reversal of the EPA's earlier policy and a long-awaited assumption of responsibility for air-quality issues in lower Manhattan.

Although eagerly anticipated, the program raises concerns that indoor contamination in some of Lower Manhattan's commercial buildings will remain, since the EPA's program only applies to residential property. In cooperation with the EPA, the city's Department of Environmental Protection has been cleaning the exteriors of some 236 buildings in Lower Manhattan.

In addition, residents and civic leaders are concerned that the

EPA's clean-up is being conducted on an apartment-to-apartment basis as opposed to on a building-to-building basis; therefore, the risk of recontamination is increased. Further concerns were voiced about the inadequate or nonexistent cleaning of air ducts and ventilation systems. Parents of children at Stuyvesant High School have expressed concern over the failure to install a new state-of-the-art ventilation system in the school. There are eight public schools in the area and although all have reopened, parents feel that the EPA should conduct a comprehensive health evaluation of all students.

Is New York City prepared for future environmental emergencies? One lesson learned is that the EPA should coordinate its efforts and communicate with both state and local governments to establish a distinct leadership role in responding to future emergencies that involve federal involvement. This would avoid the situation of "passing the buck" between the different agencies and ensure a comprehensive application of environmental response.

Hacer a la Gente Votar

The upcoming election will bring an unprecedented voter outreach by NYLCV to Latino communities in New York City. The New York League of Conservation Voters Education Fund (NYLCVEF) will partner with community organizations to contact Latino voters and encourage them to consider environmental issues such as high asthma rates, noise pollution and lack of open space at the ballot box.



Talking Trash

ON JULY 31, MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG announced his plan for dealing with New York City's solid waste. Since the closing of the Fresh Kills Landfill, the city has trucked its waste out of state, at a cost of more than \$313 million a year. The city produces 11,000 tons of residential trash each day.

To address economic and environmental concerns about trucking, Bloomberg's plan will upgrade New York City's existing marine transfer station system to include containerization and waste compaction at each site. Containerization will vastly improve the environmental impact of the city's waste removal process, by enabling the city to use its waterways to safely



Containerization of waste and its shipment on barges is a key element of Mayor Bloomberg's plan.

transport containerized rubbish. This will drastically reduce road degradation and pollution, and expand transportation alternatives to include barge, train and ship. The question of the containers' final destination, however, remains unanswered.

A successful implementation of the Mayor's scheme will solve half the problem. Only 50% of New York City's waste is residential; commercial waste will con-

tinue to be processed at privately owned land-based transfer stations. Many environmentalists believe that an intelligent, long-term solution will integrate the commercial and residential transfer systems in a marine and rail based system. The Mayor expressed the hope that commercial waste operators will eventually pay to use the city's marine transfer stations.

This announcement comes shortly after the Mayor and City Council voted to temporarily suspend the collection of plastic and glass for recycling. The Bloomberg administration has created a task force to re-evaluate its recycling program. NYLCV will be working to ensure the task force devises a comprehensive long-term recycling strategy that is fully integrated into the solid-waste management plan.

Victory for Community Gardens

On September 18, Attorney General Elliot Spitzer and Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced that they had reached a settlement of the attorney general's lawsuit to protect New York City's community gardens. The settlement preserves the vast majority of

community gardens and establishes a comprehensive review process for those which are being proposed for development. The settlement addresses many of the issues and concerns contained in City Council legislation, Intro. 206, promoted by NYLCV.