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THE WALL STREET JOUR

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Uneven Treatment

Near Trade Center, Stark Disparities Emerge in Cleanups

Lax Government Leadership Leaves Some Residences With Asbestos Concerns

Companies Spend to Refurbish

By Motoko Rich And Susan Warren

NEW YORK—In the eight months that Steve Stewart and his 4,000 colleagues at American Express Co. were exiled from their offices after Sept. 11, a lot was going on in the company's headquarters across the street from the World Trade Center site. Cleaners vacuumed thick layers of dust and debris that had blown into the 51-story tower through shattered windows. Specialists tested for 120 contaminants, including asbestos, lead and mercury. Mr. Stewart returned in June to a pristine office, with a new chair, computer and gray-and-blue carpeting. American Express, the 32-year-old manager says, "did what it needed to do to alleviate people's fears."

Steve Stewart

A few blocks away, Sudhir Jain had a different experience. The freelance technology consultant moved back to his apartment five blocks south of Ground Zero only two weeks after Sept. 11. His living room was still covered by gray dust. The owner of the 208-unit residential building denied tenants' requests to hire a cleaning contractor, Mr. Jain says, so he hired his own. Confused about what sort of testing would be appropriate, he didn't do any. "We have been left to fend for ourselves to protect our own health and safety," says Mr. Jain, 40.

Nearly a year after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks destroyed the Twin Towers and unleashed a massive cloud of debris on lower Manhattan, the continuing cleanup presents a stark case of haves and have-nots. The biggest corporate tenants and landlords have conducted pricey cleanups, costing millions of dollars each. But until recently, government agencies at all levels failed to mount a centralized campaign of scrubbing and testing indoor spaces. As a result, many residential buildings, schools and small businesses have received only spotty attention.

Even without firm government guidance, many large companies and landlords "were quick to spend a lot of money, upgrade filtration systems and bring in experts," says Hugh Kaufman, a policy analyst at the Environmental Protection Agency's headquarters in Washington. But lacking official coordination—including from his own agency—many smaller landlords cut corners, Mr. Kaufman adds. "I give the private sector tremendous kudos. I give the public sector an F-minus."

Sudhir Jain

Mr. Jain's landlord at 50 Battery Place, the DeMatteis Organization, says through a spokesman that it told tenants to hire their own cleaners and submit bills for possible reimbursement by the owner's insurance company. Only a handful—Mr. Jain

What's News—

Business and Finance

SALOMON ALLOCATED nearly one million shares of coveted IPOs to Bernard Ebbers, WorldCom's ex-CEO, and to other favored clients. While the linking of investment-banking business to IPO distribution has been pervasive on Wall Street, the Salomon-WorldCom documents detail how the practice may have worked. **Prosecutors** plan to seek a grand-jury indictment against Scott Sullivan, WorldCom's former top finance executive.

(Articles in Column 4 and on Page A3)

■ **The Trade Commission** rejected a request from U.S. steelmakers to impose duties on a key product, leaving the industry scrambling to regroup.

(Article on Page A2)

■ **Durable-goods orders leapt** 8.7% in July to a seasonally adjusted $179.7 billion, allaying worries of a recessionary lapse. Consumer confidence fell in August.

(Article on Page A2)

■ **H-P reported** a $2.03 billion fiscal third-quarter loss but reaffirmed earnings and revenue estimates for the fourth quarter.

(Article on Page A6)

■ **Boeing raised** its monetary offer in a proposed three-year contract with machinists but refused to guarantee jobs, clearing the way for a likely strike.

(Article on Page A2)

■ **HealthSouth said changes in Medicare reimbursements will cut profit** and its founder will step aside as CEO to head a spinoff. Its stock fell nearly 44%.

(Article on Page A6)

■ **The SEC rebuffed** a settlement proposal by Global Crossing that the agency said would have applied generally to the company and not specific individuals.

(Article on Page A3)

■ **KPMG's U.S. arm must stand trial with KPMG Belgium in suits arising from accounting fraud at Lernout & Hauspie.**

(Article on Page A3)

■ **The SEC approved rules requiring** top executives of U.S. and foreign companies, including mutual-fund firms, to certify results they file with the agency.

(Article on Page C4)

■ **The Nasdaq fell** 3.16%, the worst one-day drop in three weeks, amid Intel's cautious outlook for the computer sector. The Dow industrials shed 1.06%.

(Article on Page C1)

■ **Enron has opened up** bidding on 12 of its main assets, adding to the glut of power facilities and pipelines on the market.

■ **Andersen Worldwide** tentatively agreed to pay $60 million to settle suits related to the collapse of Enron, a fraction of what was lost.

(Articles on Pages B3 and C1)

■ **Nortel plans** 7,000 more job

World-Wide

■ **BUSH PRESSED** a Saudi envoy to take the Iraq threat more seriously. At the Texas meeting, the president called Saddam Hussein "a menace to the world," but the envoy reiterated Riyadh's opposition to a U.S. attack. Indeed, an adviser to Crown Prince Abdullah said Washington's rhetoric is running "way ahead of the policy" and that the U.S. lacks the regional support needed to prosecute a war. The State Department said it is too early to start building such support because Bush hasn't made a decision to attack. (Page A4) *Iraqis interviewed by the Associated Press in Jordan said U.S.-British air raids near Basra Sunday destroyed a complex Baghdad was using to track U.S. moves in the Persian Gulf.*

■ **The CBO issued** a budget forecast considerably gloomier than the most recent White House predictions. Congressional budget officials say deficits will persist through at least 2006 and the 10-year surplus, projected at $5.6 trillion when Bush took office, has just about evaporated. (Page A2)

■ **Israel issued** conflicting statements on whether it will let the Palestinian parliament meet to endorse a plan for January elections. Israeli officials say a bulging wall at a Muslim holy site in Jerusalem threatens Jewish worshippers, but politics may drown practical discussion of the problem.

■ **Afghanistan plans to begin sending** Pakistani prisoners home even though many appear to have fought with al Qaeda and the Taliban. Pakistan says at least 900 of its citizens were captured when the Taliban fell.

■ **The Justice Department proposed** new rules in the wake of a Supreme Court decision requiring deportation hearings for immigrants convicted of a pre-1996 crime. But those deported without any hearing may not return.

■ **Environmentalists accuse the U.S.,** Saudi Arabia and others of working at a U.N. summit in South Africa to water down promises to cut use of fossil fuels. Developing-world leaders slammed Western farm subsidies.

■ **The U.S. struck** three people and three groups from its terrorism list. The U.S. last week asked the U.N. to take the six off its list after criticism of the evidence against them.

■ **The FAA is stepping up pressure on airlines to install bulletproof doors on all their aircraft by April.** It is convening a meeting today to keep the timetable from slipping. (Page D2)

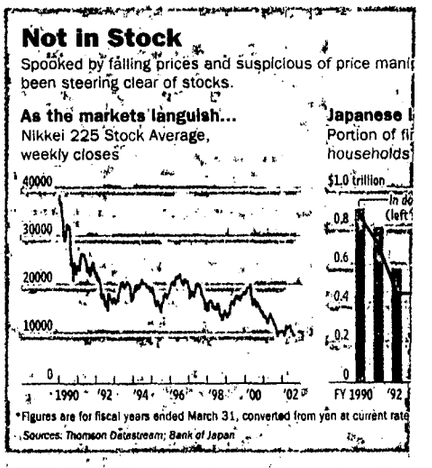
■ **Georgia's Shevardnadze attended** the funeral of a man Tbilisi said was killed in a Russian air raid in the Pankisi Gorge Friday. He said Moscow broke "all limits" with the raid.

■ **A Pakistani judge approved Musharraf's** request to expand the tribunal that will hear ex-Premier Bhutto's plea to run in Oct. 10 elections. It put off a hearing until tomorrow.

■ **China's Jiang faces criticism** from both the left and right wings of the Communist Party as a crucial Nov. 8 meeting approaches. That may complicate a leadership shift. (Page A12)

■ **The Clean Air Act of 1970 may** have prevented as many as 11,700 deaths through 1998 by cutting carbon-monoxide emissions from vehicles, a CDC study found. (Page D4)

■ **The West Nile virus is providing** public-health workers with hands-on experience that could prove valuable



Salomon Made IPO Available to Ebbers,

By Charles Gasparino, Tom Hamburger And Deborah Solomon

At a time when WorldCom Inc. was sending tens of millions of dollars in investment-banking business to Salomon Smith Barney, the big Wall Street firm allocated nearly one million shares of coveted initial public offerings to Bernard Ebbers, the telecom company's former chief executive.

But perhaps more surprising: Senior brokers at Salomon also sought to dole out tens of thousands of hot IPO shares to nearly two dozen other top telecom execu-

tives—all business w and Salom banker.

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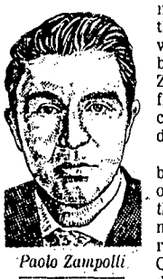
To Some, You're A Zero Without 0's In Your Cell Number

One Happy Man About Town Has Wangled 10 Lines That End in 'Thousands'

By Shelly Branch

Paolo Zampolli, the dapper owner of a New York City modeling agency, likes to surround himself with beautiful people and enviable things. There's his black stretch Chevrolet Suburban limousine in which he makes the nightclub rounds with his long-legged "girls." Three flat-screen computers flicker in his SoHo office. A Gramercy Park apartment shows off a Picasso drawing and a Miro painting.

But among the 32-year-old Mr. Zampolli's most prized possessions is a growing collection of zeros, and not the kind having to do with any bank account. Like many people caught up in the status symbols of the digital age, Mr. Zampolli is obsessed with his cellphone numbers. Each of them—12 altogether—ends neatly in two or three zeros. "I only want good numbers," says Mr. Zampolli, who hails from Milan. "What can I say? I'm addicted."



Paolo Zampolli

Telephone numbers ending in "00" or "000" used to be the province of businesses, or of the rich and famous. Companies and individuals alike would compete for them because of the obviously limited supply in any given area code. Many paid dearly to acquire and keep them.

But cellphones, and the more than 100 million new numbers created for them,

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cut corners, Mr. Kaufman adds. "I give the private sector tremendous kudos. I give the public sector an F-minus."

Mr. Jain's landlord at 50 Battery Place, the DeMatteis Organization, says through a spokesman that it told tenants to hire their own cleaners and submit bills for possible reimbursement by the owner's insurance company. Only a handful—Mr. Jain isn't among them—have submitted such bills, the spokesman says. Those claims are still being sorted out.

Public-health experts say that, so far, they haven't identified any long-term serious health risks from the disaster. But that view assumes effective outdoor and indoor cleanups of asbestos and other toxins. And while health studies continue, the experts stress they don't know yet

Please Turn to Page A11, Column 1

INDEX

Abreast of the Market....C3	Heard on the Street....C1
Amex Stocks....C10	Index Options....C14
Bond Data Bank....B4	International News....A12,13
Commodities....C12	Leisure & Arts....D8
Corrections....A2	Listed Options....C14
Credit Markets....C13	Marketing & Media....B10
Deals & Deal Makers....C4	Markets Lineup....C2
Dividend News....D9	Money Rates....C13
DJ Country Indexes....C11	Mutual Funds....D9
Earnings Digest....B5	Nasdaq Stocks....C7
Economy....A2	NYSE Stocks....C3
Editorials....A14,15	Politics & Policy....A4
Foreign Exchange....C11	*Small-Stock Focus*....C8
Govt. Agency Issues....C10	Technology....B5
Health....D4	World Stock Markets....C11

Index to Businesses....B2
What's News Online....B2
Classifieds....B7,B9,D6

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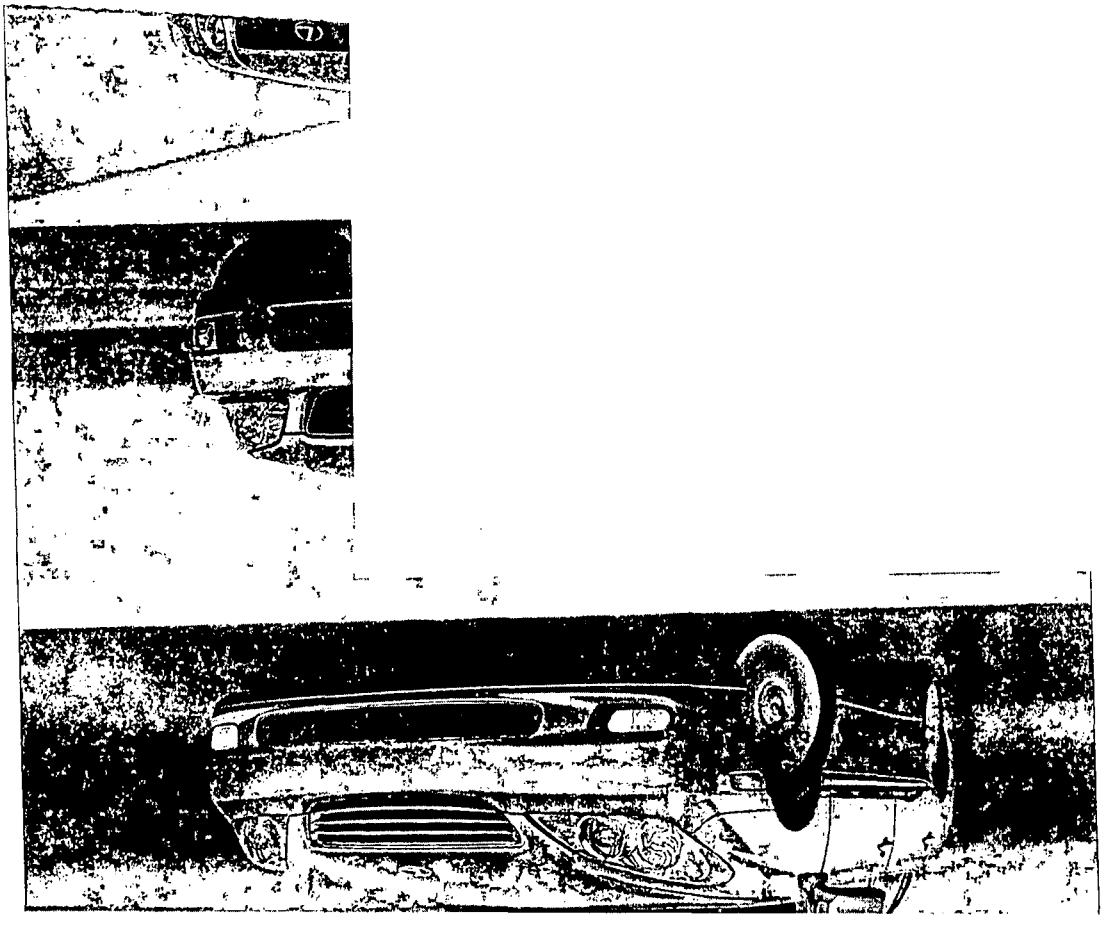
to the glut of power facilities and pipelines on the market.

■ The Clean Air Act of 1970 may



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NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

Stark Disparities Emerge in Sept. 11 Cleanups

Continued From First Page

whether the combination of substances produced by the unprecedented calamity will cause illnesses in the future. "We just don't know, but if you don't get [buildings] cleaned, obviously there will be a higher probability" of long-term risk, says Paul J. Lioy, associate director of the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute, which is supported by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and Rutgers University. He is working on a study of residents near Ground Zero.

Free-for-All

The main blame for the helter-skelter indoor cleanup of downtown Manhattan—a triangular area at the island's southern end where 200,000 people live and work—can be traced to the shuffling of responsibility among government agencies. In the days after Sept. 11, the Federal Emergency Management Agency assigned the EPA to monitor outdoor air, clear debris and dust and handle hazardous waste removed from the disaster site. New York City assumed control over indoor areas, including apartments. But the city's Department of Environmental Protection delegated to landlords and residents the job of actually cleaning up and testing. What followed was a free-for-all.

City officials distributed sketchy guidelines but did little to enforce them. The recommendations included, for example, wiping down surfaces with a wet rag but didn't specify how to tell if potential hazards had been eliminated.

EPA officials in New York say they didn't take the initiative indoors because neither FEMA nor New York City asked it to. Bonnie Bellow, an EPA spokeswoman in New York, says the regional office had its hands full for months focusing on the outdoor cleanup. "As the outdoor conditions began to improve, and it became clear that there was confusion and concern about any residual dust that might remain in people's homes, we proceeded with the development of a plan for cleaning up dust indoors," Ms. Bellow says.

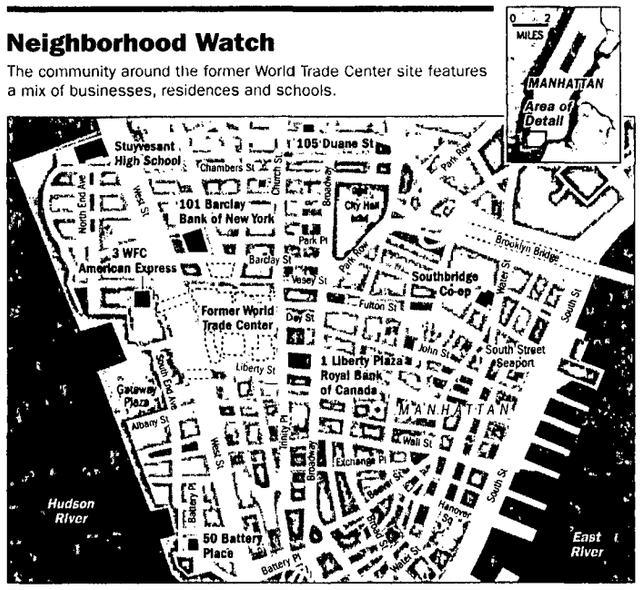
For its part, FEMA says it deferred to the EPA. "We were waiting for them to tell us there was a problem with indoor air quality," says Brad Gair, the senior FEMA official on the scene. Geoffrey Ryan, a spokesperson with the city's DEP, says his agency "worked cooperatively from day one with EPA." The city advised landlords they had to clean buildings according to a "strict protocol," Mr. Ryan says. "If there was a problem, we reviewed it."

Beginning last fall, the EPA came under escalating pressure from residents and local politicians who argued that as the country's premier environmental agency, it ought to oversee all cleaning. In May, eight months after Sept. 11, the EPA finally responded by offering to remove any asbestos from 30,000 residences in lower Manhattan. That work will begin in September.

But to get a cleanup, tenants or owners must ask the EPA to come in. That means while one apartment may be cleaned, the nearby elevator shaft or unit next door may not, creating the possibility of recontamination. The agency will clean hallways and lobbies only if asked by a landlord. The EPA isn't offering to clean small businesses or schools.

Neighborhood Watch

The community around the former World Trade Center site features a mix of businesses, residences and schools.



So far, residents in 3,160 apartments—a little more than 10% of those eligible—have asked for EPA help. Mr. Jain is one of those, but he worries his building won't get a thorough overall *treatment. "We should be getting a* proper asbestos cleanup like the corporate tenants are getting," he says.

In addition to American Express, companies such as Merrill Lynch & Co., Bank of New York Co., Royal Bank of Canada and Dow Jones & Co., publisher of this newspaper, say they have cleaned and tested extensively. The potentially dangerous substance of greatest concern is asbestos, a fibrous material used in fire retardant in the Trade Center that can cause lung disease and cancer if there is exposure for a period of years. Others include pulverized cement and glass, which can cause respiratory problems, and lead and mercury from incinerated computers and lighting, which can cause nervous-system damage.

To eliminate asbestos, big companies have stripped out carpets, cubicle walls, ceiling tiles and upholstered furniture. American Express says it threw out enough furniture and floor covering to fill a football field piled five feet high. RBC Capital Markets, a unit of Royal Bank of Canada, which occupies five floors of a black tower on the eastern edge of the Trade Center site, says it even vacuumed hundreds of thousands of individual pieces of paper.

Wall Street Journal employees began returning to the Dow Jones offices adjacent to the Trade Center site in late July. Tom Lauricella, a Journal reporter and newsroom director for the Independent Association of Publishers' Employees, says, "People have been reassured by the results of the testing on our own space so far, but they remain wary about conditions elsewhere in our building and in neighboring buildings." Melissa Coley, a spokeswoman for Brookfield Properties Corp., owner of the Dow Jones building, says, "We have directly addressed the concerns of all of our tenants and continue to monitor the air quality in our buildings."

To protect against asbestos or other toxins that might be lingering in the downtown air, Brookfield, which also owns the tower housing RBC Capital Markets, says it installed filter systems to block more than 95% of particles measuring one micron or larger. The same was done at many other large commercial buildings in the vicinity. Before Sept. 11, the standard for corporate offices was between 60% and 85%.

By contrast, at Stuyvesant High School, four blocks north of Ground Zero, the New York City Department of Education upgraded classroom filters to block fewer than 40% of such tiny particles. Students had moved back into the large, academically elite public school in October, two months before the filters were improved and while trucks were still ferrying dusty debris to barges in the Hudson River just 50 yards away.

"So here were these capitalists protecting their employees, and we have vulnerable young kids who received less protection at school. I find that outrageous," says Marlena Christodoulou, until recently the president of the Stuyvesant Parents Association and the mother of an 18-year-old son who graduated in June.

Judith Moore, current co-president of the parents group, whose daughter is starting her senior year next month, says anxiety over the school's air quality has been heightened by the lack of a centralized cleanup. But Ms. Moore, a psychotherapist, adds that in these uncertain times, parents want "a guarantee of safety for our children in this world"—something no cleanup can satisfy.

Bernard Orlan, director of environmental health and safety for the city's Department of Education, says that repeated air tests in Stuyvesant classrooms have shown that the new 40% filters are meeting all government health standards for schools. Stronger filters would have been an inefficient use of public money, Mr. Orlan says. The Education Department says it has spent $1.7 million since Sept. 11 on cleaning and testing at the 10-story Stuyvesant building.

Insurance and legal disputes have snagged some residential cleanups. At Southbridge Towers, a group of nine cooperatively owned apartment buildings several blocks east of Ground Zero, the board of directors filed an insurance claim early this year of $635,700 for a planned cleanup of building exteriors and common areas, such as hallways. In June, Greater New York Insurance Cos. provided $371,510, saying that would be sufficient. The cooperative's directors, who all live in the complex, decided to fight, filing a complaint with the New York State Department of Insurance. In the meantime, the cleaning hasn't even started. The co-op directors fear that to do so would imply that they had accepted the lower insurance payment as adequate. The directors also say they are confused about whether a government agency might be willing to do a portion of the cleaning.

Some Southbridge owners have had more success with their individual units. Gregory and Bonnie Cooper, who own a two-bedroom, 11th-floor apartment, received $5,000 from their home insurer, a unit of Chubb Corp., to hire a professional cleaner. When tests in April found asbestos on their previously cleaned terrace at levels higher than normal—although still below EPA guidelines—the Coopers persuaded the insurance company to pay another $4,000 for a second cleaning. But Ms. Cooper remains nervous. "Even if I have my terrace cleaned, my next door neighbor hasn't, so I haven't been using my terrace at all," she says. They have requested a third scrubbing from the EPA.

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Random Tests

The agency announced this month that in addition to cleanups-on-request, it would also randomly test 250 apartments for lead, mercury and dioxin, even though its scientists believe the amounts of those toxins emitted by the disaster weren't enough to threaten public health. The EPA says it will also test apartments that have already been cleaned.

Jane Kenny, the agency's regional administrator, says these steps are sufficient, in light of the lack of evidence, so far, of long-term health dangers. "We want to respect the rights of the individuals and allow them to decide whether or not to ask for the cleaning or testing," Ms. Kenny says. If the agency suspects that a building is significantly contaminated, it will urge the owner to request a more thorough cleanup, she adds.

But some residents aren't satisfied. Vasy Tabb, a 35-year-old jeweler who rents an apartment at 116 Duane Street that once looked out on the Twin Towers from seven floors to the north, says she and her husband did only normal cleaning and vacuuming in the weeks after Sept. 11. She says they were lulled by reassurance statements from EPA Administrator Christie Todd Whitman and then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani that the neighborhood's air was safe.

Soon, however, the Tabbs say they began getting skin rashes and bloody noses. George Tabb, a 40-year-old freelance writer and musician, says he had trouble sleeping because his asthma was badly exacerbated.

In October, their landlord, the large real-estate firm Related Cos., hired a consultant to test for toxins in the hallways and lobby and in apartments of tenants who requested it. Related told residents the tests didn't show any dangerous contamination by asbestos or other substances. Some residents say they aren't worrying. "People have worse problems than this," says Vas Kallas, a rock-band

In Certain Circles, Zeros Are a Cell-Number Must

Continued From First Page

day he dialed the cell number of his dreams—one containing a total of five zeros—and was thrilled to hear a voice at the other end.

"A guy picked up, and I just offered him money," says Mr. Painter. "He thought I was kidding, but we agreed on a price. I drove to his office before he could change his mind and paid him in cash." A few hours and $5,000 later, the number was formally transferred to Mr. Painter's name.

Others have relied on old-fashioned charm. Sauntering into a cellphone storefront, Elizabeth Fenner, an editor at Fortune, offered to change carriers if she could get a round number. To boost her odds of success with a male salesman, "I flirted," says the proud new member of the "00" club. She says that the number has her friends seething with envy.

discuss the numbers or how they are distributed.

But folks in the trenches—independent sales agents who help carriers sell new accounts—know firsthand how customers crave the sound of round. "People used to want their names spelled out," says Kevin Smith, an independent agent in Washington, D.C. "Now the most requested and hardest thing to get is a triple or a double zero number." Once a carrier releases a new exchange, Mr. Smith says he "jumps on it" to get as many round numbers as possible. He's been known to hook up his nagging buddies first.

Kevin Witt, an actor and personal trainer in Washington, D.C., is one such buddy beneficiary. He says that his "00" number, which appears on his photo-emblazoned business cards, looks professional and turns on women. "When I tell them my number and they punch it into the contact, then they give me a high five," says Mr. Zampella. He retains the number only because it works well in the Hamptons. A spokeswoman for Verizon said, "We try to accommodate every customer request."

In November, that may be harder to do. That's when new federal rules are set to go into effect, and carriers will get new number blocks of 1,000 instead of 10,000. Agents will then be forced to cherry-pick numbers from a much smaller pool.

Some charismatic types don't look for more from a phone number. Huddled with friends recently at Bungalow 8, a Manhattan nightclub, actor Matt Damon laughed at the idea of having a snazzy round cellphone number. "That's ridiculous," said Mr. Damon, who has never owned a cellphone himself and said he had just been forced to rent

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But some residents aren't satisfied. Wendy Tabb, a 38-year-old jeweler who rents an apartment at 105 Duane Street that once looked out on the Twin Towers from seven blocks to the north, says she and her husband did only normal dusting and vacuuming in the weeks after Sept. 11. She says they were lulled by reassuring statements from EPA Administrator Christie Todd Whitman and then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani that the neighborhood's air was safe.

Soon, however, the Tabbs say they began getting skin rashes and bloody noses. George Tabb, a 40-year-old freelance writer and musician, says he had trouble sleeping because his asthma was badly exacerbated.

In October, their landlord, the large real-estate firm Related Cos., hired a consultant to test for toxins in the hallways and lobby and in apartments of tenants who requested it. Related told residents the tests didn't show any dangerous contamination by asbestos or other substances. Some residents say they aren't worrying. "People have worse problems than this," says Vas Kallas, a rock-band guitarist whose apartment faces away from Ground Zero.

But with their symptoms continuing, the Tabbs in November decamped with their Yorkshire terrier, Scooter, to Mr. Tabb's stepfather's apartment in Greenwich Village, 20 blocks farther north. The next month, they and other tenants hired an industrial hygienist, who collected dust samples in a hallway duct on the 10th floor. One sample showed 550,000 asbestos fibers per square centimeter, a level the expert described as above normal for an urban environment, though lower than the amount that legally requires a specialized asbestos abatement.

Related hired a contractor in December to clean the ventilation system and ducts in apartments. But when residents complained that the contractor wasn't a licensed asbestos-abatement specialist, work inside the apartments stopped and was never completed.

Jeff Brodsky, president of Related Management Co., an affiliate of the landlord, says, "I wish I could get the residents to let us finish the work we wanted to complete." The cleanup wasn't legally required or necessary for health reasons, he says. "There was no evidence of any dust [from the Trade Center] in the building," he adds. Instead, Related hired the contractor "to put people at ease."

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In Certain Circles, Zeros Are a Cell-Number Must

Continued From First Page

day he dialed the cell number of his dreams—one containing a total of five zeros—and was thrilled to hear a voice at the other end.

"A guy picked up, and I just offered him money," says Mr. Painter. "He thought I was kidding, but we agreed on a price. I drove to his office before he could change his mind and paid him in cash." A few hours and $5,000 later, the number was formally transferred to Mr. Painter's name.

Others have relied on old-fashioned charm. Sauntering into a cellphone storefront, Elizabeth Fenner, an editor at Fortune, offered to change carriers if she could get a round number. To boost her odds of success with a male salesman, "I flirted," says the proud new member of the "00" club. She says that the number has her friends seething with envy.

That's part of the appeal. "People are always like, 'How did you get that number?' " says New York cosmetic dentist Pia Lieb. She says she worked the pity angle with a sales representative who had told her there was almost no chance to nab a nice round number. "I said 'You don't understand. My patients have poor memories and they need me in emergencies!' " The Verizon Wireless Inc. agent mined the database and scored Dr. Lieb her prize.

Folks in the trenches know firsthand how customers crave the sound of round.

The sleekest models of cellphones themselves confer a certain status. But cute phones are now ubiquitous and affordable. Round numbers are a new kind of vanity plate.

Most companies charge a nominal fee of about $25 to get a "00" number if they have one available.

Phone carriers, which are typically issued new cell numbers in blocks of 10,000, aren't doing much to promote the special numbers. A spokesman for AT&T Wireless Services Inc. says that they represent "a limited marketing opportunity." A spokeswoman for Sprint Corp.'s Sprint PCS business declined to discuss the numbers or how they are distributed.

But folks in the trenches—independent sales agents who help carriers sell new accounts—know firsthand how customers crave the sound of round. "People used to want their names spelled out," says Kevin Smith, an independent agent in Washington, D.C. "Now the most requested and hardest thing to get is a triple or a double zero number." Once a carrier releases a new exchange, Mr. Smith says he "jumps on it" to get as many round numbers as possible. He's been known to hook up his nagging buddies first.

Kevin Witt, an actor and personal trainer in Washington, D.C., is one such buddy beneficiary. He says that his "00" number, which appears on his photo-emblazoned business cards, looks professional and turns on women. "When I tell them my number and they punch it into their cellphone, that's when I get, 'wow!" he says. "It's definitely an advantage."

"You get greedy," says Simon Sproule, communications vice president of Jaguar, the car company now owned by Ford Motor Co. "Once you have a double 0 number you want a triple 0. You get zero envy, and that's a little scary."

Michael Bacco, a real-estate developer based in Los Angeles is also one zero short of true nirvana. "A number with three zeros is probably 50% more substantial," he says.

Mr. Zampolli, the owner of ID Model Management, spent "hours and hours," for example, badgering managers at Sprint to free up a restricted "000" cell number that was identical to his home phone number. "That was complicated, but I convinced them to give it to me," he says. When he offered to acquire five new lines from AT&T, it was on the condition that they give him precious "thousand numbers" only. The company did. He has turned down offers for free phones when he found out they came with "ugly" numbers.

Today, each of Mr. Zampolli's four personal cellphone numbers end in three zeros. Ditto the phone in his Mercedes, and the two cellphones for his driver. Wanting to share the gift of cellular allure with his girlfriend, he recently assigned her one of the idle triple-zero numbers he has managed to hoard.

Despite his prowess, Mr. Zampolli is still irked that one carrier, Verizon, has so far failed to score him a triple-zero number. "They promised me [one] to get the contract, then they gave me a 2400. I hate it!" says Mr. Zampolli. He retains the number only because it works well in the Hamptons. A spokeswoman for Verizon said, "We try to accommodate every customer request."

In November, that may be harder to do. That's when new federal rules are set to go into effect, and carriers will get new number blocks of 1,000 instead of 10,000. Agents will then be forced to cherry-pick numbers from a much smaller pool.

Some charismatic types don't look for more from a phone number. Huddled with friends recently at Bungalow 8, a Manhattan nightclub, actor Matt Damon laughed at the idea of having a snazzy round cellphone number. "That's ridiculous," said Mr. Damon, who has never owned a cellphone himself and said he had just been forced to rent one. That number, he said, was utterly forgettable.

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CBO Study Projects Much Wider Gaps In the U.S. Budget

Continued From Page A2

government still expects for 2002 a deficit at or below 3% of annual output, as rules stipulate for countries that have adopted the euro. But Hans Eichel, Germany's finance minister, said recently: "It will be close."

To keep the deficit within legal bounds, the government last week announced a spending freeze for the rest of this year and raised corporate income taxes. The government also postponed for a year a tax cut that would have benefited consumers and medium-size companies.

France said earlier this week that its economy may not grow fast enough next year to balance its budget by 2004, as previously promised. And economists have begun expressing doubts whether French government can cut taxes as aggressively as promised.

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