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One Liberty stands proud

Next to WTC, could reopen next month

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One Liberty Plaza — which rescue workers feared would collapse last week — could be re-opened to office tenants next month, according to its owner.

"Assuming we get full power and access, we can have tenants back within four weeks," said Ric Clark, president of Brookfield Properties' U.S. commercial operations.

Brookfield has set an aggressive timetable for getting tenants back into One Liberty, employing nearly 150 cleaners, construction workers and engineers to get it back into habitable shape.

The 53-story building stands across Church St. from the World Trade Center site. The twin towers' collapse knocked out 650 of One Liberty's windows and covered its base in a thick layer of dirt.

Inside, a foul odor, possibly from rotting food, pervades some areas. Some offices lie under a blanket of dust, while others, like Nasdaq's executive offices on the 50th floor, look pristine.

One Liberty seemed to be in danger last week. An optical illusion makes the building appear to bend, and falling debris might have created fears of collapse. At one point, rescue workers ran from the building. News accounts said the top of the building was "buckling."

"I was upset and concerned, because I knew it wasn't true," said Clark.

"The joke we had was that at noon every day the building had collapsed, and then by five o'clock it had been resurrected," said Paul Wilson, a spokesman for the Royal Bank of Canada, a tenant.

An engineer hired by the city declared the building safe. And Brookfield is now sending out daily e-mail reports to its tenants, such as Goldman Sachs and the law firm Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton.

Crews have removed broken glass from the bottom 19 floors of the 2.2 million square foot building. Floors 20 through 30 are scheduled for repair today. Debris has been cleared from the ledges up to the 38th floor, according to Brookfield. The crews are putting up scaffolding and netting to begin cleaning the dirty exterior. The building still has no power, but the company expects it back by Sept. 28.

Brookfield, though based in Canada, is a major Manhattan landlord, with about 9.5 million square feet of office space here. But the company has seen most of that knocked out of commission by last week's attack. The company owns buildings 1, 2, and 4 in the World Financial Center and is unable to begin repairs on those buildings because of the broader cleanup effort.

Clark said these buildings would not be ready until two to three months after it's allowed unrestricted access to begin cleanup. Two of those buildings have also sustained greater damage than One Liberty and access is now blocked by the rescue efforts at the World Trade Center site across West Street.

Clark said business interruption insurance would cover lost rents while the buildings are closed.



TODD MAISEL DAILY NEWS

HOLDING ITS OWN On the endangered list of building that could collapse just last week, One Liberty Plaza could again be home to the 53-floors of inhabitants.

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