



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 148

Resolution condemning the federal Environmental Protection Agency's ("EPA") failure to assure and provide accurate information free of political influence to the people who work and live in Lower Manhattan regarding the air quality of Lower Manhattan following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, and further calling upon the EPA to immediately undertake efforts to ensure that the air quality in Lower Manhattan is safe to breathe and to ensure the removal and clean-up of any remaining asbestos or other toxins which may have settled in residential or commercial units or public buildings, including any such buildings containing air ventilation systems, or in public spaces where children play.

By Council Members Lopez, Gerson, Avella, Comrie, Fidler, Gennaro, Gioia, Jackson, Koppell, Liu, Perkins, Quinn, Rivera, Sanders, Seabrook, Stewart, Vann, Weprin, Yassky, Moskowitz and Clarke

Whereas, On September 11, 2001, New York experienced a horrific act of terrorism when terrorists flew two hijacked planes into the World Trade Center (WTC) towers; and

Whereas, As a result of these horrendous attacks, both towers collapsed and approximately 2,800 individuals lost their lives; and

Whereas, Due to the dust and debris resulting from the collapse of the towers, as well as the ensuing fires, individuals in the surrounding areas were exposed to many hazardous pollutants in their air and drinking water; and

Whereas, Despite the possible long-term effects of these pollutants, rescue workers selflessly raced to ground zero and assisted in the rescue and recovery efforts; and

Whereas, One week after the attacks, on September 18, 2001, former Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") Administrator Christine Todd Whitman issued a press release assuring the people of New York that results from the EPA's air and drinking water monitoring near the WTC disaster site indicated that the "air is safe to breath and . . . water is safe to drink;" and

Whereas, On September 21, 2001, in another press release, former EPA Administrator Christie Whitman

gave further assurances that due to additional detailed testing, that residents and workers of New York City were not being exposed to contaminants such as asbestos, radiation, mercury and other metals, pesticides, PCBs and bacteria; and

Whereas, According to Dr. Steven M. Levin, Medical Director of the Irving J. Selikoff Center for Occupational and Environmental Disease of Mount Sinai Hospital, who, with the support of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is currently studying the health of 6,100 patients in the wake of the disaster, many New Yorkers went back to their apartments and offices in Lower Manhattan despite their better judgment, based on former EPA Administrator Whitman's assurances; and

Whereas, On August 21, 2003, approximately two years after the WTC attacks, the EPA Inspector General Nikki Tinsley released a report, entitled EPA's Response to the World Trade Center Collapse: Challenges, Successes and Areas of Improvement ("Report"), that calls into question the accuracy of the EPA's statements released shortly after the WTC attacks; and

Whereas, According to the Report, the White House Counsel on Environmental Quality influenced the information that the EPA communicated to the public through its early press releases when it convinced the EPA to add reassuring statements and delete cautionary ones; and

Whereas, The Report further discusses that the EPA, among other things, did not have sufficient data and analyses to make statements seven days after the attack that the air around ground zero was safe to breathe; and

Whereas, According to the January 2003 results of Dr. Levin's study, approximately half of the rescue workers who assisted in clean up and recovery efforts at ground zero experienced persistent WTC-related pulmonary, ENT and/or mental health symptoms 10 months to one year following the attacks; and

Whereas, According to the Report, given the current lack of health-based benchmarks, the lack of research data on synergistic effects, and the lack of reliable information on the extent of the public's exposure

to these pollutants, the answer as to whether the outdoor air around WTC was “safe” to breathe may not be settled for years; and

Whereas, Many areas in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn, as well as areas in New Jersey, were covered by the plume of smoke arising from the destroyed WTC buildings, but not included in the EPA’s designated area for sampling and clean up, now, therefore, be it

Resolved, The Council of the City of New York condemns the federal Environmental Protection Agency’s failure to assure and provide accurate information free of political influence to the people who work and live in Lower Manhattan regarding the air quality of Lower Manhattan following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center; and, be it further

Resolved, That the Council calls upon the EPA to immediately undertake efforts to ensure that the air quality in Lower Manhattan is safe to breathe and to ensure the removal and clean-up of any remaining asbestos or other toxins which may have settled in residential or commercial units or public buildings, including any such buildings containing air ventilation systems, or in public spaces where children play.