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Public Employee Press**Members battle against "revenge of the dead rats" at DEP site in Brooklyn****By MOLLY CHARBONEAU**

Friday, April 13 was a real horror show for clerical and blue collar workers at the Dept. of Environmental Protection's North 15th Street Yard in Brooklyn. That's when dying rats poisoned by exterminators created a stench that drove members of Locals 1549 and 376 from the building.

"The problem began a few weeks earlier, when members started seeing rats and hearing them in the walls," explained Local 1549 Grievance Rep Eddie Douglass.

The yard is near the East River in an industrial zone with many outdoor dumpsters, and spring is a prime breeding season for rats.

"We could see holes where rats had dug through the walls," said Local 1549 Shop Steward Barbara Williams.

"Management called an exterminator, who laid out baits and sealed the holes," Mr. Douglass said. But that also sealed up dying rats, and they started to smell.

"The odor kept getting worse and worse until the stench was unbearable," said Deborah Worrell, a Clerical Associate 3 in Local 1549.

Jamie Berkeley, a Construction Laborer in Local 376, found it surreal "that an agency in charge of environmental protection would have that kind of smell."

Alarmed and sickened by the odor, members called the union. Chandler Henderson, a council rep from the Blue Collar Division, went to the location with Kevin Nealon, chair of the Local 376 Construction Laborer's Chapter. When they opened a closet in the kitchen, Mr. Henderson said, "The smell almost knocked us to the floor."

The problem was discussed by a DC 37 team, which also included Rosalind Smalls, chair of Local 1549's DEP Water Chapter, and Rebecca Porper of the DC 37 Safety and Health Unit. The union pulled members off the job for two days while the agency resolved the problem.

DEP opened up an office wall and found several dead rats and a live one inside. Gloved Local 376 Construction Laborers put the dead rats in garbage bags, and DEP called an extermination company to clean up the rat droppings and debris.

Within a week, DEP repaired the rat-infested wall with a sturdy plywood covering, arranged for regular extermination services, and equipped the area with rat-proof metal trashcans.

However, the union continues to battle other environmental problems including blocked fire exits, uninspected fire extinguishers, filthy showers, lack of security, water leaks in ceilings and walls, and trip hazards from jumbled computer cords.

Despite all this, says Mr. Douglass, "The city just renewed the lease," which could mean more safety and health struggles ahead.