

- ▶ Newsroom
- ▶ News Releases
- ▶ News Photos
- ▶ Public Employee Press

- ▶ PEP Nov. 2001
- ▶ Table of Contents
- ▶ Archives

- ▶ La Voz Latinoamericana
- ▶ Radio Show
- ▶ TV Show

## Public Employee Press

### Union presses on air quality problems

By **MOLLY CHARBONEAU**

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DC 37 and many locals are pressing management on air testing and protective measures to answer members' concerns about the air they are breathing in buildings near ground zero.

And at DC 37's initiative, the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health has convened a multi-union task force to confront the many issues that face members near the disaster site.

A union news conference brought the issue to public attention Oct. 12 outside the Administration for Children's Services just four blocks from the disaster site. When ACS stopped labor leaders from entering the building to meet with members and barred an independent environmental expert hired by the union to test the air, a large group of members went outside for an open-air union meeting. Their strong feelings echoed other members' anxiety about air quality throughout lower Manhattan.

"Often, management or the landlord has already hired consultants to do air sampling. We review their findings carefully during reoccupancy inspections," said Lee Clarke, head of DC 37's Safety and Health Dept. "We also urge members and managers to keep windows closed and be sure the ventilation system is set to recirculate, to keep contaminants outside."

At ACS, she said, there were reports that windows were left open over a long weekend — letting in bad air and prompting calls to the union.

"We wanted to test the air to determine if it was a sick or a safe building," said DC 37 Administrator Lee Saunders. "Our members work every day removing steel from ground zero, our social workers provide counseling, our hospital workers tend the injured — it's outrageous that we were not allowed in to test the air."

About 3,000 employees work in the building, including members of several DC 37 locals.

"It's a violation of the mayor's executive order that we can't go in to meet with our members, who are calling us about scratchy throats, runny noses and eye problems," said Charles Ensley, president of SSEU Local 371, which had hired the air-testing expert.

Local 1549 President Eddie Rodriguez told the members, "The union is here to protect you, and we all need to stick together." Local 372 President Veronica Montgomery-Costa said, "Yes, let's get on with life, but not at the expense of city workers' health."

"It's in everyone's interest, including management's, to have these test results," said Ed Hysyk, president of Local 2627.

Prevented from doing sampling, Local 371 arranged for some members to wear personal air monitors in the building. Local 371 Safety Coordinator Arnie Goldwag said the local would push for better filters on ventilation equipment and press the city and state to sample the air regularly.