

**THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,
ORGANIZATION, AND PROCUREMENT,
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
REGARDING
9/11 HEALTH: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS FOR
RESIDENTS AND RESPONDERS
TESTIMONY OF
BROOKLYN BOROUGH DEPUTY PRESIDENT YVONNE GRAHAM
Monday, April 23, 2007**

Good morning Chairman Towns and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement.

I want to thank you for spearheading this important dialogue on the health and environmental impact of 9/11, particularly as it relates to Brooklyn residents and businesses.

I am Yvonne Graham, Brooklyn Deputy Borough President, here to read the following testimony.

Both Borough President Marty Markowitz and I are extremely grateful to our colleagues from the New York delegation -- Congressman Towns, Nadler, Engle, and Weiner for introducing the 9 11 Heroes Health Improvement Act of 2007.

It is critically important that Brooklyn is included in research, surveys, testing, and health services – and that we receive our fair share of funding so that health care resources can reach the victims of 9 11.

We know that on September 11, 2001, the plumes of smoke that resulted from the devastating attacks on the World Trade Center drifted across the East River to Downtown Brooklyn, Brooklyn Heights, Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, and Red Hook.

These Brooklyn communities were impacted by the smoke – as well as the film of dust that later settled on our parks, streets, homes, and businesses across the borough.

I was living in Fort Greene at that time and experienced this directly since for days after the attack my windowsills were coated with dust.

We also know that debris from the site continued to burn and release contaminants into the air for an additional three months.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's web site now indicates that contaminants such as concrete, glass, fiberglass, asbestos and other toxic chemicals were present.

Despite the fact that Brooklyn was in the direct line of the plume, our borough has been nearly excluded from testing — and completely excluded from clean-up services.

The test results for asbestos and wipe samples provided on the EPA web site only reflect Lower Manhattan.

Although it may be too late to determine the level of contaminants that blanketed brooklyn communities, it is not too late to address the short- and long-term health affects that may have resulted.

Of the 38,937 New Yorkers who enrolled in the World Trade Center Health Registry – which was created to track the health of residents, workers, and those directly exposed to the World Trade Center collapse – 8,202 cite Brooklyn as their home, more than 20%.

But respondents to this survey had to be living south of Canal Street in Manhattan or have been directly involved with the WTC site or surrounding area to take the survey.

That means that those who live in the Brooklyn neighborhoods that experienced the direct path of the smoke plume – but were not in the downtown area during the attack – could not take part in this important health analysis.

Nearly half of the registry’s individuals who were measured in the survey have reported new or worsened sinus, breathing, or respiratory problems – so it is safe to assume that exposure to the initial plume of smoke and the debris smoke that continued until December would also have negative health impacts.

Although Brooklyn was in the direct path of the smoke plume, we received a far smaller share of the \$140 million dollars that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded to health care organizations following the attacks.

Brooklyn received just over five and a half million dollars to Manhattan’s \$106 million.

The Bronx received nine and a half million dollars of funding, nearly double the allocation that Brooklyn received.

As elected officials our number one priority is ensuring the health and well-being of our residents.

Elected officials, government agencies, health care providers, and community-based organizations must work together to protect our residents’ health and come up with comprehensive health solutions to existing challenges.

Despite the errors or failures of the past, our call to action should be making sure that Brooklynites who continue to suffer from health complications as a result of the attacks, get the health care and services they need and deserve.

In addition, securing long-term funding for research and treatment so that all victims can be accommodated and compensated is our mandate and our colleagues in the house and senate are to be congratulated for your tireless efforts.

The phrase “never forget” was ubiquitous after 9 11, referring to those we lost.

We honor their memory, of course, but we must also “never forget” those who selflessly responded to the tragedy and survived.

It may only be through the continuing momentum and action from our legislators that we will fulfill our government’s duty to first responders and others who have already sacrificed so much.

We are grateful to Congressman Towns and the members of the Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement for shining a light on this issue and for asking how we can work together to respond to the health and environmental impact of the 9 11 disaster.

Thank you all for refusing to forget.