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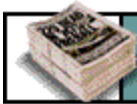
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**City Beat**

 DAILY NEWS  
**EXCLUSIVE**

## Migrants Did Dirty & Dangerous Work

### WTC cleanup crews not protected, often not paid

By ALBOR RUIZ and GREG GITTRICH  
Daily News Staff Writers

**C**ontractors have plucked up to 600 illegal immigrants off street corners to scrub potentially toxic dust out of buildings near the World Trade Center — without giving the workers safety training or protective equipment, the Daily News has learned.

State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer's office is investigating labor law violations allegedly committed by several cleaning companies near the disaster site, a spokeswoman told The News yesterday.

A News investigation uncovered complaints from mostly Spanish-speaking immigrants and labor rights groups who said the questionable hiring practices and poor working conditions were rampant in the days after the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

Among their charges:

- The immigrants said they were offered \$7.50 an hour — but many said they were stiffed after being sent on wild goose chases for their pay.
- Virtually none of the workers was warned about potential health risks.
- Most were not given respirators or other safety equipment — and some who brought their own said bosses would snatch them away for themselves.

"The most outrageous thing is that these are the workers who enabled lower Manhattan to go back to work," said Luna Yasui, a lawyer at the National Employment Law Project, which has been examining the alleged

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Egan-Chin for NEWS

**Manuel Cardenas says he has been ill since doing cleanup jobs downtown.**

abuses.

"These workers literally put their lives on the line," Yasui said. "I spoke to hundreds of them, and not one was told that the work they were doing could be dangerous to their health."

As the demand for cleanup workers near Ground Zero has decreased, day laborers have been pushed to the sidelines by trained asbestos workers.

While the day laborers' presence has faded, many said their respiratory ailments have not.

### 'Coughing and Nosebleeds'

"I've had fevers, and I have a lot of coughing and nosebleeds," said Maria Theresa Pardo, an undocumented worker who cleaned apartments on Chambers and Fulton Sts.

Nailing down exactly who hired the laborers is tricky because of the use of middlemen and the lack of a paper trail.

Most of the workers who were paid said they got cash at the end of each week. Some said they were told to go to storefronts in Queens, where anonymous men or women would pay them — or didn't show.

"There are people who didn't even know who their bosses were," said Omar Henriquez, a project manager for the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, a coalition of 200 unions and more than 400 doctors, lawyers and safety activists.



Antonelli for NEWS

**A man speaks to a group of laborers before bringing them in to work for the day.**

Undocumented workers began gathering along lower Broadway within a week of the attacks. Henriquez and other advocates said there were 400 to 600 of them.

Jostling for position on the sidewalks, the laborers would swarm when potential employers approached.

Standard agreements were \$60 for eight hours and \$90 for 12 hours — or \$7.50 an hour. The jobs ranged from a quick mopping of a deli floor to weeks of cleaning

apartment carpets.

"Not many were using masks, and they were getting sick," said Luz, 45, a worker who asked that her last name not be printed. "The Red Cross gave me my mask. There was dust everywhere in the rooms."

### **Toxic Substances in Dust**

The dust likely contained low concentrations of toxic substances, including asbestos, fiberglass and lead, said David Neumann, an industrial hygienist for the committee.

When asbestos levels in dust are above a 1% "action level," the federal Clean Air Act requires strict removal and cleanup procedures to be followed, and trained asbestos cleanup companies to be used.

Any fine dust, even if it does not contain toxic substances, can cause respiratory irritation and trigger asthma.

Groups such as the Latin American Workers Project and the Tepeyac Association are helping the workers find jobs and health care. A mobile medical unit will open Monday at Broadway and Barclay St. to provide free exams for the workers.

The project is a collaboration of the Latin American Workers' Project, the Center for the Biology of Natural Systems at Queens College and the committee.

"I want to get better," said a 43-year-old laborer from Ecuador. "I have a bad cough, and I want to get better."

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