

DUMBO Residents Work to Stop Health Risk from Industrial Demolition
Recent News re: 205 Water Street

In early December, neighborhood residents noticed that scaffolding had gone up around a historic 19C. warehouse with the address 205 Water St./188 Plymouth St. (It extends through the block with doors on Water and Plymouth, and lies mid-block between Jay St. and Bridge St.)

The three-story brick foundry erected for the E.W.Bliss Company is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Bliss' company helped build the Brooklyn Bridge and, later, built torpedoes for the Navy in World War I. This beautiful 19th Century foundry has high clerestory skylights and a large metal water tower with the name "Brillo" still visible. In more recent years the site has been used for heavy industry including auto-body repair.

Hearings to determine the landmarking status of DUMBO, a state and national registered historical district since 2000, are set to begin as early next month before the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. In a race against the clock, the developer of 205 Water/188 Plymouth Street has filed plans to demolish it. The developer is Harry Kotowitz of HK Organization, whose offices are at 79 Bridge St. (He is also the developer of the newly built 99 Gold).

The DNA jumped into action trying to save this historic building. Letters were written to city agencies, calls were made. David Yassky, our city councilman, offered to liaison with the building's owner. He reported that while HK had a permit to demolish the historic building, there were in no rush to do so and were considering re-use. Kotowitz said the scaffolding was simply a protective measure as the stucco covering the historic brick was crumbling. The DNA learned that HK's permit for demolition would expire in mid-January 2007, so we felt the immediate threat was no longer imminent.

However, HK re-newed the demolition permit – he got an extension to January 2008. We have learned that asbestos and other waste is being removed from the building in an improper fashion. The roof is now being torn off and thrown in plastic bags to the streets below. The workers are wearing haz-mat suits and masks. It is apparently illegal to throw toxic debris from the roof to the street below – yet this is what is happening. The company doing the removal is NY Insulation.

According to the Laborer's Local 78 who handles the safe removal of toxic materials such as asbestos from buildings, the removal company HK hired is unsafe. They have issued a statement that reads:

"Shame on Harry Kotowiz and HK Management for hiring a substandard company to remove asbestos from their buildings. NY Insulation is a substandard company with a history of violating asbestos regulations and cheating their

workers. Unsafe contractors expose the public to airborne asbestos. Airborne asbestos causes cancer.

Call Harry at (516) 285-4300 and demand that he hire only responsible contractors to perform this hazardous work"

Numerous complaints have been filed and shockingly, nothing has stopped this process. This past Saturday, January 13th, workers continued throwing bags filled with debris into a dumpster on Water Street below (see photo). Friday, January 19th, they are doing the same but on the 188 Plymouth Street side. The dumpster is with overflowing bags.

The DEP has dismissed this complaint several times. One inspector, who showed up on December 29th, had no protective gear with him, so he could not enter the premises. Normally a DEP inspector must be on-site to supervise asbestos removal. However, this inspector, a Mr. Lewis, said that when a company has a license to remove asbestos (as NY Insulation has) they can circumvent this regulation. When the city approves a license, the company is self-regulating, and inspectors must trust that they are working up to code. Workers told him on 12/29/06 that the job was finished and that the next day the interior of the building would be power-washed. In fact, work was not complete - the demolition and disposal of toxins continued. The illegal and dangerous practice of throwing bags filled with waste from the roof did not occur until January. (A quick internet search also reveals that NY Insulation has been cited in the past and had vehicles impounded by the NYC Department of Sanitation for illegal dumping.)

Police from the 84th Precinct responded Friday, January 19, 2007, but said unfortunately, while the throwing of potentially harmful debris through the air to the street is against the law, it is not a criminal act that the police may take any action on. Another agency would have to have action. This was the answer police gave even though minutes earlier, a neighborhood resident had spoken with one of the employees of NY Insulation, who confirmed that they were removing insulation with asbestos, and that they "really weren't taking the proper precautions" to contain the carcinogen and remove the asbestos safely.

Meanwhile, Dan Wiley of Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez's office, said that the police could in fact issue a summons. According to one emergency operator, the improper removal of asbestos was a federal offence, punishable by imprisonment in a federal penitentiary- yet this operator could not refer the caller to a federal authority.

The volunteer members of the DNA have been calling and writing every authority available (311, DEP, DOB, EPA, LPC, HDC, NYPD, LEO's) yet the hazardous and potentially cancer-causing work continues, with no regard to the health of the residents of DUMBO.

Finally we received word late on Friday, January 19th from Cathy Toren, Yassky's Chief of Staff, that they would request a stop work order. However, as of Saturday, January 20, 2007, there is no stop work order issued. On Saturday morning, the demolition was in full swing with a renewed vigor – there were even more vehicles than the day before, and a new portion of the roof had been removed.

Please contact your councilmember, **David Yassky**, 718-875-5200, to voice your opinion about this topic and write issues@dumbo-dna.org if you would like to help stop dangerous and wasteful demolition of historic buildings. Please request a Landmark Package be sent to you from the DUMBO Neighborhood Association.

The police suggest voicing your concern by calling the **Community Affairs Office** at the **84th Precinct – (718) 875 -6811**

The company doing the continued asbestos removal is:

NY Insulation
59-24-57 St.
Maspeth NY 11378
(718) 418 7550

The police suggested calling them and complaining as well.

We would like to see the proper city or federal agency step forward and finally take responsibility for third-party monitoring of this hazardous work and doing something to protect the health of our residents and their children.