

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **FEMA'S HOLIDAY GIFT TO 9/11 VICTIMS? INCREASED ILLNESS, BARRIERS TO ASSISTANCE AND PROGRAM TERMINATIONS**

**9/11 Victims and Community Coalitions Demand that FEMA and EPA Address the Urgent Health Needs of Communities Impacted by September 11<sup>th</sup> Disaster  
Candle light vigil to be held Monday, December 23**

**NEW YORK CITY.** On this rainy Friday before Christmas, 30 residents of Chinatown and the Lower East Side, members of the Beyond Ground Zero (BGZ) Network, the Rebuild with Spotlight on the Poor Coalition and the 9/11 Environmental Action Coalition, together with Congresswoman Maloney's office, stood on the steps of FEMA's downtown offices to denounce the holiday treatment that September 11<sup>th</sup> Victims have received from the government agencies responsible for responding to the health, environmental and economic impact of the disaster.

"FEMA left thousands of low-income people affected by the September 11<sup>th</sup> disaster out in the cold this holiday season," exclaimed Wah Lee of the Chinese Staff and Workers Association and a resident of Chinatown. Signs held by other residents and workers read "We want health care not toxic air", and "Rebuild New York = Rebuild Our Lives."

As New Yorkers prepare to celebrate the holidays and bring in the New Year, thousands continue to suffer the health and economic fall out of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Instead of receiving the needed support to help affected workers and residents re-establish their lives and communities in the on-going ripple effects of the disaster, this holiday season they are faced with increasing illness, inadequate assistance, barriers to relief and termination of disaster aid programs.

### ***FEMA Must Respond to the 9/11 Health Impact on Residents and Workers***

It is critical that FEMA address the urgent health-related problems of workers and residents caused or exacerbated by the environmental aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center. In addition, thousands of low-wage workers who lost their job after September 11th were thrown into further crisis due to a lack or loss of health insurance to cover these and other critical health care needs and medical expenses.

Surveys conducted by BGZ member groups this year show that 40% of Lower Manhattan residents interviewed identified access to health care as their primary concern. In addition, low-income workers and residents from Chinatown and Lower East Side were particularly hit as, according to a March 2002 report by the United Way, the largest number of workers seeking financial assistance after the attacks

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was residents of these neighborhoods. And yet, according to data released to BGZ from FEMA pursuant to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request, the Lower East Side and Chinatown were significantly neglected in terms of outreach and distribution of assistance by disaster aid programs, particularly as compared to their affluent neighbors in Lower Manhattan. In addition, FEMA elected not to include the coverage of health expenses in their Individual and Family Grant (IFG) program, even when it had clear authority to do so pursuant the Stafford Act and as outlined in its own internal handbook.

BGZ, Rebuild and 9/11 Environmental Action demand that FEMA reopen the IFG program that was terminated Thanksgiving weekend, and expand the program to cover the full range of assistance they are authorized to provide, specifically emergency medical expenses and the cost of COBRA health insurance fees for displaced workers.

### ***EPA Assess and Respond Properly to Environmental and Health Impact of September 11<sup>th</sup>***

The health and environmental impact of September 11<sup>th</sup> are still largely unfolding, and yet the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is set to end its responsibility the weekend after Christmas for the vital clean up of apartments. The coalitions denounce EPA's failure to undertake a comprehensive clean up of the environmental contamination caused by the World Trade Center attacks and to do widespread testing of the on-going impact of contaminated dust.

BGZ, Rebuild and the 9/11 Environmental Action demand that EPA end its ongoing cover up of the serious health impact of 9/11 and immediately provide adequate and culturally appropriate outreach and education to all communities exposed to the toxic air and dust. EPA must extend its cleanup to all affected areas beyond the arbitrary Canal Street boundary line. Outreach must include clear and honest information about health risks of asthma and other respiratory problems, as well as information about the cancer-causing and neurotoxin substances found in the WTC dust. Furthermore, EPA must revamp its cleanup so that it is safe, thorough and effective.

### ***Health Advocacy for 9/11 Victims***

The closure of vital programs to coincide with the holiday celebrations and the on-going health and economic crisis experienced by workers and residents is not acceptable. ***On Monday, December 23 at 3:30, BGZ and the Rebuild Coalition will host a candle light vigil with community residents and workers in front of FEMA offices on 141 Worth Street to protest the holiday mistreatment of low-income communities affected by September 11<sup>th</sup>.*** Furthermore, in the coming weeks BGZ will aid low income workers, particularly in immigrant communities, in accessing aid and to address health concerns post-September 11<sup>th</sup> at the offices of Chinese Staff and Workers Association, National Mobilization Against Sweatshops and other community-based organizations.

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