



MERCURY FOUND IN TOWER

Toothy stuff for Magic and condo developers

By Ariella Cohen

The Brooklyn Papers

City inspectors have found dangerous levels of mercury vapor in the Williamsburgh Savings Bank tower, the landmark building at 1 Hanson Place which is being converted into luxury condominium apartments by Earvin “Magic” Johnson’s development company.

The building, across the street from the Long Island Rail Road terminal and near the proposed Atlantic Yards mega-development site, is the tallest in Brooklyn.

The Department of Health (DOH) sampled the air inside of the building on June 15, one month before Johnson’s company, Canyon-Johnson Urban Fund, was preparing to demolish the building’s interior to make way for condos.

In a former dental office on the eighth floor of the 34-story building, the air sampler recorded 2,300-2,400 nanograms of mercury vapor per cubic meter — more than double the level that would mandate a government-supervised cleanup in a residential unit.

Before Johnson’s company teamed with developer Dermot Co., to buy the tower, many dentists offices were located there. In years past, mercury was a common ingredient in dental fillings.

In one-third of the locations tested by the DOH, dental tenants begat mercury vapor levels that were well above the governmental safety regulations for residences: 200-300 nanograms per cubic meter.

“Every time someone made a filling, he would take a mortar and pestle and mix up a little bit of mercury,” said Arnold P. Wendroff, the Brooklyn resident who, in April, requested the Department of Environmental Protection inspect the building after he discovered that the former dental facility was to be converted into residences.

“All that mercury went right down the sinks into the pipes and the sub-flooring,” he said, “I worry about pregnant mothers living there.”

To help resolve the problem, Dermot Co. plans to replace the building’s plumbing.

“Everything will be 100 percent new,” promised Andrew MacArthur, a spokesman at the Dermot Company.

“[The DOH] recommends that we do another check before we [put in condos] and we’ll do that too,” he said, “You don’t convert dental offices every day.”

In 2002, Governor Pataki tightened restrictions on dental use of mercury and, with the Department of Environmental Conservation, created new regulations for the recycling and

disposal of dental mercury waste.

Dentists no longer use elemental mercury, which has been found to cause birth defects and cause neurological damage, in tooth fillings, substituting the silver metal with another amalgam.

Vapor levels discovered in the building were not high enough to warrant any special cleanup.

“Frankly, the mercury in the building isn’t that surprising,” said Robert Goldberger, an endodontist who has been in practice on the 15th floor of the building for past 19 years.

“I am more concerned about the asbestos in the walls than the mercury vapors,” he added.

In the June report of air samplings at the tower, the DEP stated that no mercury levels were detected. On Nov. 4, the DOH issued a more extensive report that showed the high mercury vapor levels.

Public health officials say the toxic metal will linger if not cleaned properly.

“Generally speaking, it’s not easy to remediate mercury,” Anthony Carpi, an environmental toxicologist at John Jay College of Criminal Justice told the Daily News.

By April, Dermot Co. plans to begin selling condos at the tower.

Hopefully, MacArthur said, “Magic” Johnson will come to visit around that time.

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