

Super!

July 2005

Electronic Edition

The newsletter of the Superintendents Technical Association, Inc.

Promoting excellence in apartment building operation and maintenance

Through education, training and public information



Promover excelencia en la operación y el mantenimiento de edificio de apartamento

Con la educación, entrenamiento e información del público

Calendar 2005

Date	Topic and Speaker
7-26	Manhattan: Grech on Housing Law
7-27	Bronx: Repeat Manhattan
7-28	Brooklyn: Repeat Manhattan
8-23	Only 1 meeting, in Manhattan, topic tba

SEE DIRECTIONS TO MEETINGS ON PAGE 7

Are You Often Fine But Too-Often Fined?

Grech on Housing Law at our July Workshops

Peter Grech, STA President, is not only an experienced building superintendent but a sought-after teacher and consultant on multifamily building operation and maintenance. A key skill is to avoid the myriad fines and other penalties in the laws and regulations of the various agencies of the federal government, the state and the city.

Notes will be distributed.

Note on Membership: STA membership entitles you to all the privileges of membership at any meeting, whether in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Bronx, etc. All persons are invited to attend meetings free. **But:** Certificates of Attendance are issued only to members. Come and get to know us!

June Meeting Report

The Indoor Environment

By Glen Stoltz, Webmaster

WE ARE CORRECTLY CONCERNED about the effects of global warming, and we've heard a lot in the press about the air quality of our cities - especially New York's - in recent years. So much so that legislators everywhere have passed national, state and local laws governing fossil fuel burning emissions to diminish greenhouse gases.

We've reduced the toxic substances released into the air each year by a significant amount because we now

know that our health and even our life spans can be affected adversely by the outside air we breathe.

Children are especially sensitive to bad air and toxic substances, more vulnerable to their adverse effects. The per capita rates of asthma, for instance, are higher in cities, and the effects of exposure to burning fossil fuels has often been cited as the core culprit.

But did you realize that a more immediate threat can be found in your own indoor living environment? Your indoor air quality can greatly reduce the quality of your health and by extension, your life.

There is plenty to keep a person up at night, worrying. There is air purity in general; there are surfaces to keep clean; and there are objects that you bring into the home that, over time, release toxic substances into your living environment, into the air you breathe.

The list of potential air contaminants is long and scary-looking:

- Particles in the air, including construction and demolition dust
- asbestos and fiberglass particles
- pesticides used to lessen other threats to the environment
- soil and gases from animals - pets or otherwise
- formaldehyde from carpets and other furniture or from building materials such as plywood and other treated construction materials
- biological contaminants, such as dog and cat dander, dead bugs and rodents, as well as their feces
- combustion contaminants, such as the byproducts of burning fossil fuels as mentioned previously and tobacco smoke
- the threat that heavy moisture brings to a closed environment, and the molds that can be bred in and on construction materials with the help of humidity and warmth.

Indoor living environments have themselves exacerbated negative health conditions in those living

within them, so much so that it has been given a name: Sick Building Syndrome (SBS). SBS has been diagnosed and treated building-wide in many instances in recent years.

Building Related Illness (BRI) has been diagnosed also, where a doctor or patient finds the blame for a patient's sickness in large part to be the living environment itself for the onset or exacerbation of certain illnesses.

Residents' responses to poor indoor air quality range from mere discomfort to acute reaction, from chronic to life threatening.

Supers and other building support personnel are the first line of defense in all residential properties, and are also usually the first to get a complaint from residents about their reactions to toxic substances. It is certainly in the best interests of management to look for answers to negative indoor air quality when a potential problem is pointed out.

On June 28, the Superintendents Technical Association had one meeting for all of the members in our three groups. Maria Vizzi, president of Indoor Environmental Solutions (IES) is very knowledgeable in her field and a great spokeswoman, as well as a thoroughly engaging personality. One of our superb group of vendor members, Maria spoke to us at our usual meeting place in the Top of the Times on 43rd Street in Manhattan.

Her five year old company located in the Bronx (718-824-6591) works to help whole buildings - as well as individual apartment dwellers and home owners - find that delicate balance between cleanliness (and the health benefits derived from cleaning), and sensibly spending hard-earned dollars with an eye to keeping our indoor environments healthy.

Environmental cleaning concerns such as IES will go to your building and do a property-wide assessment of health threats, if any, found in your indoor environment. Then they will evaluate the problems and propose best practices to eliminate the potential health threats.

One of the likely trouble spots they always look at: the air ducts in your building, such as toilet and kitchen exhausts, as well as heating and cooling ducts. Are the fan motors working? Is there sufficient air movement? Do the inside surfaces of the vents and ducts themselves need a thorough cleaning?

Owners, property managers and supers rarely spend a minute thinking about their buildings' ductwork, even though bad air from dirty ducts can make you sick. (Can you say Legionnaire's Disease?)

It is also true that this can be rectified. Air ducts and vents can be thoroughly sanitized, fan motors and belts can be replaced, and objects that gives off toxic matter can be discarded. IES can also install air sterilization systems within your HVAC system itself.

Your exposure to toxic substances released over time from carpets, furniture and other surfaces can be greatly reduced. To every problem there is a workable treatment; there are solutions to be found for the problem of tainted air in your indoor environment.

Businesses such as IES will examine your building and give you their professional assessment of the innate problems they find, and will recommend solutions. It's up to you to take the first step. The very informative IES website is at <<http://www.iesnyc.com/>>.

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Welcome New Members

STA is pleased to announce the election of the following individuals: (There are many more, still to be logged in.) Eric Allen, Rob Case, Luis Herrera, Camilo R. Pavon, and Rite Flooring, Inc (Saeed Erfani).

And thanks to all of you who renewed your membership recently.

Both new and renewing members are mailed STA's new membership cards. A computer-selected member number is included. If you paid dues and did not receive a card, please let us know. *Dick Koral*

Items from the BuildingsNY Show in June

There were hundreds of things to see and pick up at the Javitts Center last month. Here are a few of them.

How to Read a Water Meter: The City's Department of Environmental Protection was handing out a very informative pamphlet. You can see it on the Web by going to:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/pdf/readmeter.pdf>.

"Keeping Mercury Out of Our Environment": NLR (Northeast Lamp Recycling, Inc.) picks up lamps, eWaste, batteries, PCB/non-PCB ballasts, mercury devices "and much more" its pamphlet reads. The West Windsor, CT firm can be reached by phone at toll-free 1-888-657-5267 or look them up at www.NLRlamp.com.

AA Window Parts & Hardware Catalog: Awesome:

There are 94 pages in this catalog, each page displaying 10 different window parts. You do the math! The Bronx STA vendor member can be reached toll free at 1-800-804-0147 and can be glimpsed at

<http://members.aol.com/aawindow/aastart.html>.

Some Observations by VP Gene Marabello

I had a very interesting conversation with a co-op shareholder who told me that his building had a super who worked his way up to the position and that the Superintendents Technical Association was just the connection his super needed to improve his knowledge and build his assurance.

We also talked about managers, boards and shareholders and how they interact with each other. His building, as is the case with so many, is fraught with favoritism, bias and discrimination. The shareholder seems to feel that the super is the kingpin and the most knowledgeable and responsible part of the building management team and I discussed how his super should be given a larger roll in the running of the building because of this.

The strong issue on the floor was Local Law 6, with the issue of visibility in hallways and staircases during a electrical outage. (Go to www.glolady.com to see one very interesting Web site that deals with this – *Editor*)

Bill Aristovulos' video presentation of our air conditioning maintenance workshop at City Tech in May was a winner.

Observations by Exec. Committee Member Bill Aristovulos

Many people had questions about our Bio-Fuels program. On a whimsical, but very important little device.... they just loved the water conservation drip gauges. I wished I had had a couple hundred more to give out!

Many people asked about what we do, what is our mission. I told them simply that we were here to educate, elevate, and disseminate useful information that would help *both* staff and management elevate building maintenance and operations to a higher strata. In other words, like the banner sez, "Promoting excellence in apartment building operation and maintenance through education, training and information."

Sheepishly, I told attendees that the word Superintendent or Super in our name was a bit of a misnomer, that we are not only for supers, but also for handypersons, porters, doorman, and, *by crackie*, managers, vendors and even owners -- virtually anyone involved in building maintenance and operation.

It was a special pleasure to greet many current members who stopped by to say hello. Many more attendees showed great interest in joining the association.

The show was a whopper! And thanks to Peter, Dick, Gene, Jose and Zoltan, I was able to roam around and catch the show on several occasions, like I said or rather like Ed used to say "a *realllly* big show." (I leave his impression to your imagination.)

There were many, many exhibitors there, ranging from the sublime to the really serious stuff. Every gimmick imaginable was tried to "suck in" the attendees into the exhibitors' booths: robots, people dressed in silly costumes, surreal mannequins, giveaway items of every color and description. One guy was giving away bamboo back scratchers! There was free food, candy and drinks and winsome ladies giving the stuff away!

Attendees stuffed their bags with the goodies. Some of these folks were carrying so many bags that they looked like weird overgrown chipmunks with hopelessly over-gorged jowls brimming with food, waddling down the aisles!

Giveaways aside, there was a wealth of information to be had and a golden opportunity to talk to the vendors and manufacturers of the very products and services we use in our work every day. There were new ideas and solutions to be explored. It was a veritable smorgasbord of facts and education with some fun thrown in.

If you missed it this year, don't miss it next year!



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Or email rkoral@citytech.cuny.edu.*



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Matthew Arnold, Pres.

**STA Demonstrating Biofuel for Heating
NYC Apartment Buildings**

STA's EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER Bill Aristovulos, a super in Greenwich Village, will soon be supervising, on behalf of STA, supers in several boroughs and from buildings who have elected to participate in a unique experiment funded by NYS Energy Research & Development Authority.

These buildings will be demonstrating the use of biofuel for heating apartment buildings during the coming (Fall '05 through Spring '06) heating season. Biofuel is #2 heating oil mixed with 20% plant (soybean) oil. The master contract for this project is with Cornell University Cooperative Extension NYC Program. There are two subcontractors: Brookhaven National Laboratory and Apartment House Institute of City Tech, acting on behalf of STA.

(The biofuel mix, known as B20, has been used successfully during an entire heating season in over 100 homes in the Newburgh, NY area. You can review a good deal of information regarding biofuel on the website of the national trade organization of the National Biodiesel Board at www.nbb.org as well.)

We are looking for three or four 16 to 30 unit apartment buildings. If you know of building owners who may be interested in participating, contact Dick Koral at 718-552-1161 (or rkoral@citytech.cuny.edu) or

John Nettleton at Cornell University, 212-340-2937 (or jsn10@cornell.edu).

Each of the participating buildings will establish its own account with one of the two heating fuel dealers handling B20 biofuel, and Dr. C.R. Krishna of Brookhaven National Laboratory will do site visits to get each heating plant up to par, prior to the beginning of the heating season.

We will be organizing the project during the next few months, and look forward to responses as soon as possible.

Biodiesel Basics

(from the official site of the National Biodiesel Board, www.nbb.org) *Note: biodiesel and biofuel, for our purposes, is the same thing.*

What is biodiesel?

Biodiesel is the name of a clean burning alternative fuel, produced from domestic, renewable resources. Biodiesel contains no petroleum, but it can be blended at any level with petroleum diesel to create a biodiesel blend. It can be used in compression-ignition (diesel) engines with little or no modifications. Biodiesel is simple to use, biodegradable, nontoxic, and essentially free of sulfur and aromatics.

How is biodiesel made?

Biodiesel is made through a chemical process called transesterification whereby the glycerin is separated from the fat or vegetable oil. The process leaves behind two products -- methyl esters (the chemical name for biodiesel) and glycerin (a valuable byproduct usually sold to be used in soaps and other products).

Is Biodiesel the same thing as raw vegetable oil?

No! Fuel-grade biodiesel must be produced to strict industry specifications (ASTM D6751) in order to insure proper performance. Biodiesel is the only alternative fuel to have fully completed the health effects testing requirements of the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments. Biodiesel that meets ASTM D6751 and is legally registered with the Environmental Protection Agency is a legal motor fuel for sale and distribution. Raw vegetable oil cannot meet biodiesel fuel specifications, it is not registered with the EPA, and it is not a legal motor fuel.

For entities seeking to adopt a definition of biodiesel for purposes such as federal or state statute, state or national divisions of weights and measures, or for any other purpose, the official definition consistent with other federal and state laws and Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) guidelines is as follows:

Biodiesel is defined as mono-alkyl esters of long chain fatty acids derived from vegetable oils or animal fats which conform to ASTM D6751 specifications for use in

diesel engines. Biodiesel refers to the pure fuel before blending with diesel fuel. Biodiesel blends are denoted as, "BXX" with "XX" representing the percentage of biodiesel contained in the blend (i.e.: B20 is 20% biodiesel, 80% petroleum diesel).

Why should I use biodiesel?

Biodiesel is better for the environment because it is made from renewable resources and has lower emissions compared to petroleum diesel. It is less toxic than table salt and biodegrades as fast as sugar. Since it is made in the USA from renewable resources such as soybeans, its use decreases our dependence on foreign oil and contributes to our own economy.

DEP/HPD Water Conservation Seminars 2005

The Departments of Environmental Protection and Housing Preservation and Development co-sponsor a series of three-hour seminars on water conservation, water/sewer billing and the transition to metered billing. The classes are free.

Wednesday, Sept 7, Manhattan – 100 Gold St., 6 p.m.

Tuesday, Sept 13, Bronx, 10 a.m.

Wednesday, Sept 28, Manhattan – 505 8th Av., 6 p.m.

Tuesday, Oct 11, Manhattan – 100 Gold St., 10 a.m.

Wednesday, Oct 19, Manhattan – 100 Gold St., 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Nov 9, Manhattan – 505 8th Av., 6 p.m.

Tuesday, Nov 15, Bronx, 10 a.m.

Tuesday, Dec 13, Manhattan – 100 Gold St., 10 a.m.

Wednesday, Dec 21, Manhattan – 100 Gold St., 6 p.m.

Manhattan: Classes are held at HPD's building at 100 Gold Street near City Hall or at the Association for Energy Affordability (AEA), 505 8th Avenue, 18th Floor (corner of 35th Street). **Bronx** classes are held at the AEA's Training Center located at 105 Bruckner Blvd.

Directions to AEA Training Center, 105 Bruckner Boulevard, Bronx, NY 10454, (718) 292-6733

From Manhattan – Upper West Side: Go East on 125th Street to 1st Avenue. Go left on 1st Avenue onto Willis Ave. Bridge. Stay in right lane on bridge, slight right to Bruckner Boulevard at the bottom of the ramp. Building is directly across the street. Go left for best parking.

From East Side and Downtown: Take FDR Drive North to Willis Avenue Bridge –Exit 18. Stay in right lane on bridge, slight right to Bruckner Boulevard at the bottom of the ramp. Building is directly across the street. Go left for best parking.

From Queens: Triborough Bridge to I-87 North/Maj Deegan Expressway – Exit 47 – on the left towards Albany. Merge onto I-87 North. Take Exit 2 towards Willis Ave/3rd Ave Bridge. Go straight onto East 135th

Street. Go left onto Alexander Avenue and left again onto Bruckner Blvd. For best parking go past building.

From Brooklyn: Option 1: Go into Manhattan and follow above Manhattan directions. Option 2: Take Triborough Bridge and follow above Queens directions.

From Westchester County: Take I-87/Major Deegan Expressway south to Exit 1 – Brook Avenue, go right onto Brooke Ave. Go one block to Bruckner Boulevard, right on Bruckner – building is immediately on the right. For best parking go past building.

By NYC Subway: Take #6 train from Manhattan to the Brook Ave. stop (the 2nd local stop in the Bronx, so from Manhattan it's 2 stops past 125th St) at 138th St. Go south on Brook Ave for four blocks (passing under the underpass for the Major Deegan Expressway) to Bruckner Boulevard. Go right on Bruckner one block, 105 building is on right hand side, AEA is the 2nd entrance (See sign above the door.)

DIRECTIONS TO MEETINGS:

Manhattan Chapter: Penthouse, Times Square Hotel, 255 W. 43rd St (corner of 8th Ave.) A train to 42nd St.

Bronx Chapter: Hostos Community College, East Academic Complex Building, 450 Grand Concourse. Get room from security guard. Take 2, 4 or 5 to 149th St. – Grand Concourse look for church on the right, then Chapel Street on its left. 25 Chapel St. is half way down the block on the left. **Or** Take 2, 3, 4, or 5 to Borough Hall. Walk east to Jay, then left on Jay and follow as above. **Or** Take N, R, to Court Street. It's the same station as Borough Hall.

By car, Brooklyn Bridge to Tillary Street, left on Tillary, left on Jay. Or, BQE to Flatbush Avenue exit. Puts you on Tillary. Cross Flatbush Ave. Right on Jay. Free parking on street is difficult. There are two commercial lots there, however. stop.

Brooklyn Chapter: Division of Continuing Education, NYC College of Technology, 25 Chapel St., 4th floor. Take A, F, or C to Jay St -Boro Hall. Walk north on Jay. After crossing Tillary,

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Are We Finally Becoming Water Wise?"

By Mark Bruno

Chief Editor, *Plumbing Engineer*, April 2005

(Reprinted by permission)

SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, while visiting a friend, I noticed that he was taking an inordinate amount of time hand-washing his dishes. If I recall correctly, while we were debating over the country's current state of its social security program in the kitchen, the faucet ran for a good 45 minutes.

At one point during our conversation he stopped scrubbing grease off a frying pan to offer his side of the debate for about 10 minutes, while the faucet continued to stream water down the drain. I asked if he ever planned on turning the faucet off, to which he replied, "Our apartments aren't metered separately, so what do I care?"

I half-jokingly retorted with, "And it's not like we're going to run out of water any time soon, either, right?"

My friend isn't what you'd consider a "water-wise" person, and judging by statistics published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), he's not alone; we're all guilty of wasting water at one point or another.

Unfortunately, most of the problem stems from the fact that it's easy for us city folk in the United States to take water for granted, because we don't think about how much we depend on it day after day. We turn on a faucet, and it's there. Need to take a 45-minute shower in the morning? Hey, it's not like we're going to run out any time soon, right?

But good 'ol H₂O really is a very important part of our lives, whether or not we conscientiously realize it. We drink it, bathe in it, brush our teeth with it, wash our clothes and dishes in it, wash our pets and cars in it, give our plants life with it, keep food cool with it – I can go on and on. The point is, water truly is one of our most

versatile and valuable resources, so it's important not to waste it.

According to reports from the EPA, the average American uses about 50 to 75 gallons of water a day. Think about your day today. What have you done so far that required water? Certainly you brushed your teeth, and used the restroom. You may have watered some plants or the lawn, or washed the car. Could you have used less water and still accomplished these tasks?

The answer is yes: there are plenty of ways to become "water wise." Communities all across the country seem to be taking great efforts to reduce wasteful water consumption and it appears that the international community is taking steps as well. The United Nations is set to launch its "Water for Life 2005-2015, International Decade for Action" this year, beginning on March 22. The theme of the decade echoes what one UK-based organization, *WaterAid*, has been saying for years: water for life.

The program is aimed at helping ensure that the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are met. The MDG's aim to halve world poverty by 2015 by halving the proportion of people without access to safe water and sanitation, reducing child mortality by one third and ensuring that all of the world's children gain access to primary education.

UN Resolution 58/217 highlights how important water and sanitation are to achieving all of the goals, stating that: "...water is critical for sustainable development, including environmental integrity and the eradication of poverty and hunger, and is indispensable for human health and well-being...The goals of the Decade should be a greater focus on water-related issues at all levels and on the implementation of water-related programs and projects, while striving to ensure the participation and involvement of women in water-related development efforts."

Certainly, these are words to consider the next time we wash the dishes, because there could very well come a day when even we won't have access to safe and sanitary water.

Most conversations are simply monologues,
delivered in the presence of witnesses.
(from an anonymous source. *Editor*)

One Super Life: Tales from the Tripped
By John Tripp

13 Super Golden Rules (What Supers Wish Residents Knew)

THOSE OF US who are resident managers and multi-family building superintendents work daily with a sense

of the precariousness of our situations, doing our jobs day to day at the pleasure (or displeasure) of the boards and management companies who hire us.

As such, we are often infinitely more circumspect about what we say to our residents than to each other on staff and internalize much of our thought processes on resident/maintenance worker relational problems.

This is, for the most part, because most of us have been hired less for our communication skills and more for our handyman skills.

The super who can verbalize well, and put on paper what he or she is really feeling without also feeling intimidated, and without alienating the building's population, is in the minority.

All of us who have worked in property maintenance for any length of time have a short list - either abstractly and only in our heads, or more concretely on paper or in our PDAs - a catalog of items that we wish those people for whom we work truly understood about us and our chosen vocation. (PDA is short for *personal digital assistant*, a handheld [device](#) that combines [computing](#), [telephone/fax](#), [Internet](#) and [networking features](#) - *Editor*)

We all wish we could express it briefly, succinctly and with a sense of humor about it all, and that those around us could read our list and internalize it to the point where everything we say to them is heard, and everything we do for them is seen, as highlighted by "the list".

Not a list of commandments, but of "rules". Not written in stone, but in caring and with humor, and with some sensitivity to ourselves as well as the humans we work for in particular, and the human condition in general.

What follows then is one very unoriginal list, gleaned from many years experience and from long associations with several of the best of Manhattan's long time supers and resident managers:

1. 1a. If you ask a question you don't want an answer to, expect an answer you don't want to hear. 1b. If you demand an honest answer, don't be surprised when you get it. It's only logical, folks.
2. If you think you're calling after hours, you probably are. Don't call and ask "Am I calling too late?" It's a no-win situation for a super to answer that question honestly.
3. If you run out of hot water while taking a shower, it's not *always* the super's fault. Indeed, it is hardly *ever* the super's fault. Learn to blame the plumbing and heating gods without a second thought and without smirking, just like we do.
4. You can either ask us to do something *or* tell us how you want it done, not both. Remember: most supers already know infinitely more about how-to stuff than you ever will.

5. Get thee to the local hardware store, buy a toilet plunger, and learn how to work it. And get to know your way around a circuit breaker box. If you don't know these things and really do want to know, ask us - we'll teach you. Otherwise wait until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning. We don't like being interrupted at dinner (or bedtime) for these non-emergency items.
6. If something is not a life-altering emergency, we consider crying to be cruelty. Enough said?
7. Ask for what you want. Understated hints don't work. Strong hints don't work. Really obvious hints don't work. We're grownups. Just say it. We can take it.
8. Come to us with a problem only if you want help solving it. It's what we do.
9. Bob Vila didn't need directions from his audience; neither do we. If you want to watch us work, please don't talk and watch (emphasis on *don't talk*).
10. If you think you *might* be too cheap when doling out the holiday tips, you definitely are - by at least 50%.
11. If you think your super's salary is too high, spend a week following him around and watch him work. You'll be shocked at his awesome responsibility, and will quickly understand that whatever he's making, it isn't nearly enough.
12. "Very handy" does not equal "miracle-worker". Supers are by definition very handy, but most of the time we are *not* miracle workers, in any true sense of the words.
13. If in doubt, if all else fails or you've run out of options and you're tempted to blame the super again, see rule number 3.

Recycling

By Sam Williams and Joshua Brustein, *Gotham Gazette*, June 27, 2005

LISTENING to Mayor Michael Bloomberg and New York City Council Speaker Gifford Miller fight over garbage this month, the casual observer could be forgiven for thinking that the mayor's entire citywide plan for garbage centered on a single pier on the Upper East Side. The development of trash policy has recently gotten bogged down over the mayor's call to use several such piers as places for garbage trucks to unload onto barges. The dispute reached a *climax* on June 22nd when Miller failed to block the opening of the so-called marine transfer station in his district.

But with this diversion out of the way, officials and environmental advocates are turning back to the central issues of a plan that is rich in details on how to move the city's trash around, but, critics say, short on everything else.

"It's our hope that the controversy is over and we can get back to the overall business of this plan, which is how do we deal with the rest of this 50,000 tons per day of waste," said Eddie Bautista of the Organization of Waterfront Neighborhoods.

In the past, the city has dealt with waste by burning it, or burying it. Now Bloomberg is focusing on shipping it away. But the City Council has published its own plan that lists recycling as its major priority, and criticizes the mayor's plan for failing "to put forward any real programs or policies that would reduce waste and increase recycling."

Councilmember Michael McMahon, head of the council's sanitation committee, will soon begin negotiating with the mayor over the council's concerns. His hope is that by September a compromise plan will be worked out -- and that it will prominently feature recycling.

Are New Yorkers Recyclers?

In theory, increasing the amount of garbage that is recycled is a goal that everyone can agree on. But how to do so is not necessarily simple, and officials differ on how much recycling the city can reasonably expect.

Currently, about 20 percent of residential waste in New York is recycled. City life poses serious challenges for those planning ways to raise this rate. Most New Yorkers live in apartments where there is often little space to set up bins to separate garbage. And although residents are legally required to recycle, apartment-dwellers are relatively invulnerable to tough enforcement measures, because it's hard to find out who in a large apartment building isn't recycling in order to fine them.

Further, many New Yorkers are confused about what is recyclable. A recent survey conducted for *Gotham Gazette* by Baruch College's eTownPanel found that about 85 percent of city residents knew that newspapers are recyclable, but less than half knew that aerosol cans are, and only about 40 percent knew that wire hangers are. At the opposite end, about 40 percent knew that plastic deli containers are NOT recyclable, and a mere 20 percent knew that they cannot recycle shampoo and lotion bottles.

Some believe that a mixture of education and enforcement could significantly raise the rate of recycling in the city, but Mayor Bloomberg is skeptical that these will make much difference.

"The more you recycle the better off you are," he told WABC-FM earlier this month. "But most [of the city's waste] is going to get thrown out."

The Mayor's Attitude: Skeptical of Recycling

The mayor's attitude towards recycling has displeased recycling advocates in the past. Facing a daunting budget gap in 2002, the mayor decided

recycling was a luxury the city could not afford. The city suspended its glass and plastic recycling programs.

It wasn't the first time that the city had cut back on recycling efforts in tough times. When the environmental benefits of recycling are measured against its economic drawbacks, the economics generally win out.

"Whenever something bad happens, recycling gets pushed back," said Carmen Cagnetta, legal counsel to the City Council's solid waste committee.

Recycling has always been vulnerable to budget cuts because historically it has been more expensive than dumping garbage in landfills. While taking trash to a landfill costs significantly more than it does to take it to a recycling plant, the higher cost of collecting recyclables more than offsets these savings.

Advocates have long hoped to develop a way to make recycling as cheap as waste disposal. If achieved, this goal of "cost parity" does work to protect recycling programs. The city didn't consider eliminating paper recycling in 2002, for instance, because it was actually getting paid by private companies for the recyclable paper, rather than having to pay.

The Mayor's Plan: Making Recycling Pay Off

The mayor's overall garbage plan calls for the city to load its waste onto rail and barges and ship it out of the city, instead of relying as heavily on trucks as the city does now.

Environmentalists and activists from low-income neighborhoods have thrown their support behind the plan, because it decreases the city's reliance on trucks, and spreads the burden of waste management throughout the city. The main criticism of the plan has been that it does not address where to send the trash, thus doing little to deal with the city's fundamental trash related problem: its reliance on increasingly pricey landfills in distant places. (Report in .PDF format)

For recyclables, however, Bloomberg's plan does identify what it says is a good place to send waste. The city has forged a long-term relationship with recycling company Hugo Neu, in order to secure stable, favorable rates. As incentive to sign the 20-year contract, the city has agreed to invest \$25 million to help Hugo Neu build a recycling facility in Sunset Park. Savings from the terms of the contract, the city believes, will more than offset the cost of the plant.

As the cost of recycling decreases, the cost of waste disposal will be increasing, thanks to the capital investment necessary to make the transition to new forms of transportation. This some see as a good thing.

"This short-run increase in waste disposal costs, coupled with a new contract that lowers the fee paid for processing the city's recyclables, alters the economics of waste management increasingly in favor of recycling as a cost-competitive alternative to disposal," wrote

Elisabeth Franklin and Preston Niblack of the Independent Budget Office in a recent analysis. (report in PDF format)

The analysis concludes that, all things being equal, the mayor's plan will make the cost of recycling roughly equal to that of waste disposal.

While Bloomberg's plan may end up creating a strong financial incentive to recycle, critics still deride its lack of a coherent recycling strategy.

"Exporting trash is one little piece of solid waste management. The city has a golden opportunity to commit in writing to innovative waste prevention, reuse, and recycling initiatives," said Majorie Clarke, co-chair of the New York City Waste Prevention Coalition. "That's the guts that they're missing."

The City Council's Alternative

The City Council aims much higher than the mayor in terms of recycling. Bloomberg's goal is to have 26 percent of residential waste be recycled by 2010 and a 33 percent residential recycling rate by 2024. The council plan is much more ambitious, calling for an increase in residential recycling from 20 to 25 percent by 2007, and by 2015 a combined residential and commercial recycling rate of 70 percent.

Increasing recycling rates not only has environmental benefits, it has economic advantages as well. The more residents can be taught what is recyclable -- and either encouraged or forced to do it -- the cheaper recycling becomes. Collecting garbage is less expensive than recycling because the same truck can gather more tons of garbage per route than it can of recyclables. This is partially due to the relatively low weight of recyclables -- plastic weighs less than food waste. But the more recycling that ends up on each curb, the less it costs to collect each ton of it.

"If the city is successful in increasing recycling beyond recent levels, it may even become the cheaper alternative, creating a strong incentive to promote recycling as a way to hold down the total cost of waste management," wrote Franklin of the Independent Budget Office. (Report in PDF format)

The mayor's plan brushes over this potential; there are few specific ideas for increasing recycling rates. By contrast, the council's plan calls for establishing a division in every community board that will tailor recycling programs to the local level. A new city agency would oversee this, leaving the Sanitation Department -- which proponents of the plan describe as insufficiently committed to recycling -- out of all recycling education and outreach programs.

"[Recycling] is never going to flourish under Sanitation," said Cagnetta.

But Benjamin Miller, former director (and current critic) of policy planning for the Sanitation Department and author of *Fat of the Land*, a history of the city's

garbage, doubts whether the council's plan will be effective. Any recycling plan should set a single standard for the entire city, he says, rather than relying on individual efforts in each neighborhood. And the best way to have a citywide plan is to keep a single agency in charge of all waste issues.

"The plan proposes what I would argue are likely to be quite inefficient systems [that] reflect a flawed understanding of how a recycling system should be designed," he said. "We have to keep it simple." Miller believes the best way to increase recycling is to charge people for the amount of garbage they throw out, creating an incentive to reduce the amount of waste they produce by, for example, recycling more.

The council's plan also calls for increasing commercial recycling rates, and attempts to establish ways to recycle or reuse materials that today tend to end up in landfills.

Zero Waste: Beyond Recycling

Some of these strategies were discussed at a recent conference of recycling advocates held in downtown Manhattan. The conference's focus was to formulate programs that go beyond recycling by increasing the scope of what can be recycled and reduce consumption in general in a comprehensive strategy.

Attendees noted the success of initiatives in California and Maine that reduced waste at the source. They suggested more aggressive citywide compost recycling and a surcharge on plastic bags. A similar "plastax" law in Ireland reduced plastic bag use there by 90 percent.

The city would need help in implementing some of these ideas. Any new tax, for instance, would need to be approved by Albany.

The council has embraced these principles as part of its plan. It is currently considering several actions, including a bill that would require manufacturers to take back and recycle, reuse or properly dispose of a percentage of the electronics they sell. Another resolution calls on the state to pass a bill that would expand the bottle deposit to more products.

Jordan Barowitz, a spokesperson for the mayor, told the *New York Times* that the administration is willing to consider substantive changes to its plan, and specifically cited adding measures to increase recycling. But council's plan, he said, was "a gimmick. It doesn't advance the negotiations at all."

Garbage plans in New York are often written and rarely implemented, and there is no guarantee that the council and the mayor's negotiations this summer will end up producing anything resembling either of their plans. But if the officials can navigate the ever-tricky politics of garbage, recycling advocates see the potential for an economic and environmental payoff in the ideas currently on the table.

Study Suggests Toxins' Effects May Be Passed Down through Generations

(From *Grist* summary)

A pregnant woman's exposure to toxic chemicals may cause harmful effects not only in her children, but in her grandchildren and theirs, a surprising new study suggests. For some time scientists have known about "epigenetic" changes: chemical modifications of DNA that affect the way it is expressed (phenotype), without changing the genetic code itself (genotype). What Washington State University researchers discovered -- and report in the journal *Science* -- is that such changes can be passed from generation to generation.

This, suffice it to say, flies in the face of some fairly central assumptions in biology. It also raises disturbing questions about the long-term effects of chemical pollution.

"In human terms, this would mean if your great-grandmother was exposed to an environmental toxin at a critical point in her pregnancy, you may have inherited the disease," says lead researcher Michael Skinner. "It is a new way to think about disease." And by "new" he means "freaky."

Mayor Signs Bill on "Potty Parity"

Lisa L. Colangelo, *New York Daily News*, June 7th, 2005

WHAT A RELIEF! Mayor Bloomberg signed the so-called "potty parity" bill yesterday, requiring more women's toilets in newly built arenas, bars, convention halls and movie theaters.

For every toilet in the men's room, there must be two in the women's, according to the new law.

"We're talking about the quality of life for women. It's as simple as that," said Council member Yvette Clarke (D-Brooklyn) at the bill-signing ceremony.

Women "have had to really endure sometimes degrading situations just trying to take care of their personal business," Clarke said.

The new law covers all new, and some renovated buildings.

"A number of times I've been in a restaurant waiting for a small men's room to open up and a woman comes out," Bloomberg said to laughter. "This hopefully will solve that problem."

Paulette Geanacopoulos, executive director of the Women's City Club of New York, called it "a major health bill."

"Any of us who have waited for 25 minutes to get into a rest room watching men walk in and out will strongly support this legislation," she said.

Rent Increase

Landlords can raise the rent on the city's more than 1 million rent-stabilized apartments by as much as 5.5 percent as of October 1, the Rent Guidelines Board decided on June 21. The increase -- up to to 2.75 percent for one-year leases and 5.5 percent for two-year leases -- is the lowest hike since 2002. But, as usual, both landlords and tenants complained about the board's decision. (*This item was taken from Gotham Gazette's Eye-Opener online, June 22*)

Discrimination In Housing Is Rampant

By Joe Lamport, *Gotham Gazette*, June 7, 2005

AMERICANS ARE SO USED TO DISCRIMINATION that many people rationalize it away these days, saying "Well, Latinos want to live with other Latinos and Blacks want to live with Blacks."

We've lived with it for so long, we don't even think it's wrong anymore," said Andrew Cuomo. "We have to start to say we're not going to take it anymore."

Cuomo, the former secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, is the founder of HELP USA (Housing Enterprise for the Less Privileged), which in April started the Fair Housing Justice Center to address housing discrimination. He was one of the speakers at a recent symposium on fair housing.

It doesn't take a symposium to make clear that housing discrimination is rife throughout the United States. And despite its reputation as the progressive center of the country, New York City abounds in examples: An apartment ad on the popular Craig's List web site stated that families with children need not apply. The city has more than two million units of housing inaccessible to people with disabilities, according to a city study.

Those looking for the scarce good news when it comes to housing discrimination can point to the city's human rights law, which affords protection against discrimination to more classes of people than the state or federal governments. But, out of earshot of their bosses, some workers at the agency primarily charged with enforcing that law, the city's Commission on Human Rights, readily admit that the complaint-driven enforcement mechanism is ineffective. Most people simply do not complain about discrimination, and there is no aggressive testing to root out violators.

"New York City is more segregated in 2000 than it was in 1910," said Craig Gurian, the executive director of the Anti-Discrimination Center of Metro New York. An interactive map showing racial concentration in the city over the years proved his point. "Racial segregation just keeps growing and growing. We have to admit that we haven't been very successful in fighting this problem."

At the symposium on fair housing, a variety of speakers addressed four specific areas where discrimination in housing is particularly glaring:

- predatory lending schemes that target Latinos, African Americans and other people of color
- women who are victims of domestic violence denied housing because of the potential for violence in their households
- immigrants denied housing for, among other things, complaining about conditions in their apartments
- and, persons with disabilities effectively denied housing when landlords refuse to make reasonable accommodations.

Despite the severity of the problem, few agencies are doing much about it. Though HELP's Fair Housing Justice Center opened recently, with financial support from HUD, this comes two years after the closing of the Open Housing Center, a focused and citywide independent effort to enforce city, state and federal human rights laws.

The city's efforts amount to little more than telling people that discrimination is against the law. Even that it does not do very well, unless you consider pretty posters effective.

Predatory Lending Schemes

There is a new, almost pathological twist on the traditional discrimination against African Americans and other people of color. Once unable to obtain loans to buy houses or "redlined" out of certain areas by banks and other loan-making institutions, people of color are now actually targeted by such institutions for lending, called predatory lending because of how its practitioners prey upon vulnerable people.

"The vast majority of people being targeted for predatory lending are people of color," said Josh Zinner, founder and coordinator of the Foreclosure Prevention Project at South Brooklyn Legal Services. "This is very much a racial issue."

A map Zinner provided made the point convincingly. When sites of predatory lending were overlaid on a demographic map of the city, it was painfully obvious that predatory lenders are targeting people in neighborhoods where people of color predominantly live.

Predatory lending occurs in three general categories, Zinner explained: When people refinance loans on homes they already own; when people purchase homes or "flip" property -- buy it and sell it quickly; and, when people are in foreclosure proceedings and lending institutions show up to "save" them by refinancing their mortgages.

In some cases, the victims of these practices end up taking on loans that are completely unaffordable and

wind up losing their homes; in others, they sign over the deed to their homes and lose them.

“It’s such an emergency situation that there are bills in Albany to address it,” Zinner said. But he urged people to oppose a bill in Congress, the Responsible Lending Act, also known as the Predatory Lending Protection Act, which would eliminate protections for consumers considering mortgages. That law would supersede state laws for institutions with federal charters.

Victims of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness, according to statistics from the Women’s Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union. In New York City, as many as a quarter of all homeless parents were homeless as a direct result of domestic violence in 2002, according to a study by the Institute for Children and Poverty.

“Landlords are holding the tenants responsible for the violence in their apartments,” said Emily Martin, the project’s staff attorney “In public housing, if the police come to the home, it’s seen as a disturbance that the tenant caused.” In other cases, she said, domestic violence victims’ applications for apartments are rejected because of the potential for future violence.

One answer is litigation, Martin said, and she pointed to a case in Vermont where her team successfully used the federal Fair Housing Act to compel a landlord to drop an eviction proceeding against a woman who had been battered. The landlord’s claim that the woman was partly responsible for the violence reflected a gender stereotype of domestic violence victims, and the law holds that such stereotypes are discriminatory.

The Disabled

The discrimination that disabled people face in housing varies depending on their disability. The city’s human rights law has been effectively put to use to force landlords to make apartments accessible for people with

disabilities. While the federal Fair Housing Act says tenants have a right to accessible housing, it places the burden of paying for accommodations on tenants. The city’s law, on the other hand, places that burden on landlords, as long as this does not create an “undue hardship.”

“Ignorance around disability laws is amazing,” said Ted Finkelstein of the Commission on Human Rights and coordinator of its Project Equal Access. The project educates people on the law and makes landlords make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities: install ramps, free up parking spaces, and install lighter windows, for example.

Convincing landlords to make those improvements is rarely easy, he said.

“Owners go through a litany of reasons for why they cannot make reasonable accommodations.”

Immigrants

The discrimination immigrants face is probably significantly under-reported, or rather, even more under-reported than other types of discrimination. I have written previously about the problems immigrants face. At the symposium, Alfred Placeres, an attorney who specializes in immigration law, highlighted some consequences – overcrowding and illegal sublets – while emphasizing that helping people resolving their immigration issues was an important way to help them.

Landlords can refuse to rent to illegal immigrants and avoid a discrimination complaint by saying that they did so because the immigrants have no verifiable income, no credit history, no tax returns and no social security numbers, he said.

Joe Lamport is the assistant director of the City-Wide Task Force on Housing Court, a coalition of community housing organizations.

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