

**Testimony of Edwardo Torres before the Subcommittee on Health**  
**Wednesday, April 22, 2009**  
**“James Zadroga 9/11 Health & Compensation Act of 2009.”**

Chairman Pallone and members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Edwardo Torres. I am 47 years old and I am a resident of Jersey City, New Jersey. I am a construction worker by trade, and a member of Plumbers Local Union 14, AFL-CIO, based in Lodi, New Jersey. I am testifying before you today in support of the “James Zadroga 9/11 Health & Compensation Act of 2009.”

I come before you this morning as a citizen who simply wanted to do their part to assist the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and to assist responders. But now I am suffering serious health effects due to the exposure to Ground Zero toxins, and the breathing in of these toxins and pulverized building materials.

My story begins on September 12, 2001.

I arrived at Ground Zero from New Jersey at 11:00 a.m. Workers were being recruited from my job site through my local union to assist in the rescue efforts. Upon arrival in Manhattan by ferry from New Jersey, I immediately began to assist police and firemen in their rescue attempts of possible survivors trapped in the rubble of the World Trade Center and to move debris from the “pile.”

I was assigned to the “bucket brigade,” which slowly and painstakingly removed debris from certain areas via a long line of people, passing one bucket after another of material down the line. I performed this task until 8:00 p.m. that evening.

I returned to the “pile” on September 13, September 14 and September 15. Over the course of these four days, I performed the same exact task for approximately 60 hours combined.

The first day on the “pile,” I wore a simple dust mask and a hard hat. The three following days, I wore a two canister filter respirator and a hard hat. Through this time, we dug through the “pile” by hand because shovels simply didn’t work well. The entire time, I was filling up buckets, we were instructed to carefully sift through and review all the materials, in an attempt to identify remains.

Although the environment I was working in was surreal – the weather actually couldn’t have been nicer out. It was very clear out and the sun was shining. Also, after the first day, the level of dust in the air appeared to the naked eye to have been reduced –although smoke and the smell of fumes were intense at times. This false sense of security and the frenzied dedication to our work sometimes forced us to remove our respirators. We also removed them when we ate and drank water – both of which occurred right on the “pile.” I was completely unaware of the health hazards that were present in the air. And although the dust appeared to be minimal, I would be reminded of the massive amount of dust in the air when I washed my face on an hourly basis – and when drying it with a paper towel – I saw a heavy grey cover on it. I wiped massive amounts of soot from my face on a regular basis.

When I went home from Ground Zero on September 15, I was proud to have volunteered every ounce of energy I had over those last four days helping victims of the attacks. That day was the last that I volunteered at Ground Zero.

I returned to my home late Saturday, September 15 and I attempted to go back to the “pile” on September 16<sup>th</sup>, but they were no longer running ferries from New Jersey, and much of the work was now being contracted out, so less volunteers were being recruited. I returned to work on Monday, September 17<sup>th</sup>.

It’s important to note that I never had any health problems prior to 9/11. In fact, I would consider myself to be in great shape and I jogged approximately 3 times a week. I never had any problems breathing.

For the first four months after 9/11, I had no symptoms or health problems of any kind. That changed with what I would describe as a on again, off again sore throat, starting in February of 2002, in which I would loose my voice on occasion.

Then in late 2002, I started having stomach pain – not discomfort – but pain. Similar to the worst type of acid reflux or heartburn. I had no stomach problems at all prior to 9/11.

This persisted and got consistently worse over the course of the next three years. In 2005, the throat and stomach problem got considerably more problematic. At this time I decided to see a physician, and that was March 2005.

These health problems started to dramatically effect my day-to-day lifestyle – sometimes being too sick to attend family events, for example. Also, I was having a hard time at work communicating with other workers due to my throat problem.

The worst then came in November of 2005. Over the period of time leading up to this, there were times I could no longer walk up more than one flight of stairs and work was becoming much more difficult. That winter, I lost about 6 or seven days of work, because in the cold weather I simply couldn’t breathe.

In fact, at one point, during a dance performance, massive chest pain occurred and the inability to breathe forced me stop the performance.

I also now had extreme difficulty lifting materials and often had to stop working.

There are days now that I can’t run with my kids, participate in sports, and my sleep cycles have been disrupted due to respiratory problems.

In 2005, my doctor gave me a full check up, including lung and throat tests. He indicated restricted lung capacity, but no diagnosis was made at the time. A CAT scan of my throat came back with nothing. Unfortunately, symptoms persisted.

The only medicine I was on at this time was acid reflux, but symptoms got worse. At this time, I visited a lung specialist who performed a PET scan and CAT scan in March 2006 and October 2006, and was then diagnosed with having two modules or cysts in my lungs, about 6 x 8 millimeters in size – resulting in lung opacity as well as lung scaring. The doctors however did not say this was a result of my exposure.

After finding these problems and recognizing in my opinion that they were a result of my work at Ground Zero, I decided to attend the Mt. Sinai World Trade Center Medical Monitoring Program for an examination and was accepted into the program in May of 2006.

At this time I was diagnosed with two WTC-Related Health Conditions – Gastro-esophageal reflux disorder (GERD) and Chronic respiratory disorder.

My treatment then began at this time and I was taking prescription medications to treat the constant throat pain I was suffering from.

Eventually, I had surgery – which was paid for by the medical monitoring fund in October 2006. The surgery removed a mass or polyp on my throat – it was not cancerous. After surgery, I was out of work for six weeks.

I found the care givers from the World Trade Center Medical Monitoring Program to be very compassionate. Also, unlike my first doctor, they had a thorough understand of the context in which medial examinations and treatments were required. These care givers understood the 9/11 association and how to treat these problems specifically.

The program also performed an extensive breathing analysis, or a PFT test, pulmonary function test. Every 3 months I receive a check up, CAT scan and meet with doctors. Since May 2006, I have been to the program 24 times. The program pays for this treatment and monitoring and my insurance through my union pays for the CAT scans. I have never paid for anything out of pocket, with the exception of prescription drug co-payments. I have been to the program in Piscataway, but prefer New York City because it's a shorter drive.

Under the “James Zadroga 9/11 Health & Compensation Act of 2009 legislation” I would continue to receive the medical monitoring, since both of my diagnosed conditions are on the list of identified WTC conditions specified in the bill.

This would allow me to continue to have the costs of my medical treatment paid for, but would also assist other affected workers who are currently struggling.

For workers like me and others participating in this program, the monitoring and treatment are essential. Furthermore, under the bill, we would be allowed to receive non-treatment core services such as education on my condition, counseling and advice on how to identify and obtain benefits if needed from workers' compensation, health insurance, disability insurance or public or private social service agencies.

In closing, I would like to repeat a question a nurse gathering research from me asked at Mt. Sinai Hospital and ask you to put in context as you deliberate this legislation. I was asked in August 2008 during a check-up at the monitoring program, “If you understood the health effects resulting from your Ground Zero volunteering, would you have still went?” I responded “yes” before she even had a chance to finish the question. Despite all the pain this has caused me, I would not have changed a thing. Those people needed me. My country needed me. I had to do the right thing. I now respectfully ask you to respond to our health needs, by also saying “yes” when the bill comes up for a vote.

Thank you.