



**Community United to Protect
Theodore Roosevelt Park**
150 W. 79th Street, Suite 6E
New York, NY 10024
protecttrpark@gmail.com
www.saveourpark.nyc

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From: Community United to Protect Theodore Roosevelt Park
Contact: Lee Clauss
Telephone: (646) 337-4877
Email: community.united.leec@gmail.com or protecttrpark@gmail.com

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If Unearthed, Asbestos at American Museum of Natural History Building Site Threatens to Contaminate UWS

New York, NY – In its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) acknowledged that without appropriate remediation precautions, asbestos and other toxic substances will be released into the air when the AMNH demolishes existing buildings and excavates part of Theodore Roosevelt Park to build the Richard Gilder Center on Columbus Avenue at West 79th Street.

The AMNH Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)—an 8,000+ page document released near midnight on Wednesday November 15th and allowing only a ten-day comment period, which falls over Thanksgiving week and ends at midnight on “Black Friday,” November 24th—continues to offer no appropriate Remediation Action Plan for the possibility of unearthed asbestos contaminating the air, water and soil of the Upper West Side.

Much of the asbestos in the buildings slated for demolition (contained in window glazing and caulking, drywall, plaster, vinyl floor tiles, ventilation duct and thermal pipe insulation and spray-on fireproofing) is typical in older buildings and should not be hard to mitigate using standard procedures. But the AMNH offers no specific mitigation plan, for example, for what the FEIS identifies as an “L-shaped rifle range enclosed in concrete beneath what is now open parkland.”

The following question begs for an answer: How is it that, while asbestos is mentioned 99 times in the hazardous materials appendix of the FEIS, and while the EPA instructions for an asbestos management plan is itself a 25-page document, the AMNH should devote three scant pages to its asbestos management plan?

And how is it possible that the 3-page document lacks any real specificity as to the plan, timeline or AMNH’s public accountability for the asbestos removal? The glaring fact is that the Museum’s plan is vague and deficient, with no effort expressed anywhere in the 8,000+ pages of the FEIS to notify the community of specific asbestos removal operations at all.

Asbestos is harmless if left undisturbed. But if it is rampant, as in the shooting range and in some stairway walls within one of the buildings cited for demolition, the current AMNH demolition and construction plans for the building of the Richard Gilder Center will disperse it into the air, water and soil, turning the site into a potential minefield.

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In a recent interview with local New York television station NY1, mesothelioma activist Erin Brockovich was quoted as saying: "One asbestos fiber inhaled into the lungs will ultimately result in mesothelioma."

Community United to Protect Theodore Roosevelt Park (CU) demands that the American Museum of Natural History release to the public, whose health and safety are at stake, the complete extent of asbestos contamination within the projected site, and a satisfactory Remediation Action Plan. CU demands that the AMNH do the same for all other toxic substances that have been found on the site and are potentially lethal if disturbed, among them lead, benzene, trichloroethylene and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

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Community United is an organization of Upper West Side residents devoted to saving Theodore Roosevelt Park in its entirety, preventing potential environmental disaster, and standing up to the greed of private developers.

Editor's Note: For further information about Community United to Protect Theodore Roosevelt Park, contact Co-President Laura Messersmith, Telephone: [\(617\) 335-5210](tel:6173355210), Email: LQMessersmith@gmail.com, website: www.saveourpark.nyc

The Community United executive board welcomes one-on-one press availabilities with interested members of the media.

Attachment

- PDF of press release