

## **Crane Crash = Buildings Bungling?**

**Queens Civic Congress Executive Vice President Patricia Dolan points out that, "Finally, DoB [the City Department of Buildings] is getting the attention it so richly deserves. QCC and other civics need to keep pointing out that it's not just crane failures that cause loss of life. [Look at] DoB's failure to enforce the building code and zoning regulations." The Queens Civic Congress Zoning and Code Enforcement committee has been working with DOB staff to improve the DOB response to community concerns and has reported responsiveness but the large picture suggests even more work remains; Queens Civic Congress with work with all concerned to achieve the reforms necessary to protect New Yorkers from unsafe buildings.**

<http://www.amny.com/news/local/am-crane0320,0,6234936.story>

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## **Buildings chief slammed after crane collapse**

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In May 2007, a beaming buildings commissioner, Patricia Lancaster, stood alongside the mayor to unveil what many had predicted was an impossible task: the first revision of the city's building code in nearly four decades.

Nearly a year later, after a series of deadly construction-related accidents -- including last weekend's midtown crane collapse, which killed seven, Lancaster is facing sharp scrutiny and criticism from officials who question the agency's ability to enforce those regulations.

The site of the crane collapse on East 51st Street, where a 43-story tower is being built, had 13 open buildings violations at the time of Saturday's accident, which agency officials and Mayor Michael Bloomberg said was normal for a project of its size.

"I don't understand how we can accept these violations and classify that as normal," said Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer. "If that's the mind-set of the department, then we need to shake it up."

The Buildings Department inspected the midtown construction site Saturday morning because high winds were anticipated, and issued a stop-work order for concrete operations. No problems were found with the crane. Investigators are now focusing on frayed nylon straps that may have given way while a 6-ton piece of steel was being hoisted.

Bloomberg said critics were unfairly characterizing the site's history.

"The violations had nothing to do with this," Bloomberg said at a news conference Saturday evening. "Every large construction site has violations. They were not serious."

Six construction workers and one woman visiting from Miami were killed, and 10 people were injured.

Yesterday, the Buildings Department began inspecting crane sites citywide -- 253 in all -- but it was not clear when the reviews would be completed, said agency spokeswoman Kate Lindquist.

Lancaster was not available for comment Wednesday, but during the weekend, she issued a statement saying the safety sweep of all cranes was not prompted by fears of unsafe conditions elsewhere.

"We have no reason to believe that Saturday's tragic accident is indicative of a larger problem with similar equipment being used around the city," she said. Lancaster has said that the increase in accidents is due, in part, to the city's construction boom. The number of construction permits issued in New York City went up 36 percent between 2002 and May 2007. And the number of safety violations has nearly doubled over the past year.

"It's indicative of all the construction that's happening," said Councilman Erik Dilan of Brooklyn, who is chairman of the Housing and Buildings Committee. "It may be a question of resources. I don't know if any other person had been commissioner, they could have prevented these accidents."

The City Council will hold the second of a series of hearings on construction safety, this one focusing on crane operations, on April 29.

"The Buildings Department is in chaos and meltdown," said Councilman Tony Avella of Queens, who has called on Lancaster to resign. "This is not something we can play around with."

Council Speaker Christine Quinn of Manhattan cautioned against a rush to judgment.

"We don't yet know all the facts that led to the East Side crane collapse," Quinn said. "Construction is a crucial component of our economy, but we cannot sacrifice safety in the name of development."

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