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FEBRUARY 10, 2020

DOWNTOWN PARENTS CALL FOR CITY OVERSIGHT TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM HARMFUL MERCURY POISONING

*Chin bill creates strict City procedure to identify and remediate
elemental mercury before approving risky ground work*



SOUTH STREET SEAPORT – Council Member Margaret S. Chin rallied with Downtown parents and school leaders today to celebrate the introduction of legislation to create strict City standards related to the exposure, testing and remediation of elemental mercury on properties adjacent to schools.

“When it comes to the health and well-being of our children, our City must do whatever it takes to protect

them,” said **Council Member Chin**. “When you drop your kids off at school, you deserve the strongest reassurance that your child will be safe. Parents in the community have been alarmed by the discovery of mercury under the parking lot of 250 Water Street, and have been organizing for additional transparency over the cleanup process. While we are proud to secure an independent monitor, my legislation calls for the City to provide oversight and be a proactive partner to prevent mercury poisoning in the most vulnerable in our community.”

Over the last year, Council Member Chin has been organizing with fellow elected officials and community advocates to demand transparency over development plans and to secure stringent environmental protections since Howard Hughes Corporation submitted an application to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Brownfield Cleanup program for 250 Water Street, a parking lot adjacent to two elementary schools and several day care centers — indicating an intent to build on the South Street Seaport site.

The site has been suspected to hold mercury underground, which upon release into the air can cause severe health impacts on young children who inhale its vapor.

As a community engagement process continues around the future of the site, parent leaders have been fighting for additional oversight of remediation plans to protect children from mercury vapor exposure.

Last year, Council Member Chin worked with Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer to secure an independent community monitor to oversee the process, paid for by Howard Hughes.

“We must protect our most vulnerable populations from exposure to contaminants like mercury,” said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**. “Thanks to Council Member Chin for this essential reform. Mercury can cause significant and irreversible damage, especially to children. Additional oversight will ensure that our communities will remain as safe as possible.”

In June 2019, a state bill was passed to prohibit the installation or covering of mercury-contained flooring in schools.

This week, Council Member Chin will introduce legislation to call on the City to create its own standard of mercury vapor exposure related to construction, which does not currently exist. This bill will also require property owners to submit a determination about the likely presence of mercury and complete remediation before being allowed to do any foundational or earth work. If there is any elemental mercury found on a property after a permit is issued, the City will have the power to issue a stop work order. By prompting inter-agency cooperation among the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Buildings, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, this bill aims to establish a comprehensive procedure to safeguard the health and safety of children and nearby residents.

"After we learned about the dangerous levels of mercury at 250 Water Street, we were equally shocked to discover that there were no laws to protect children from mercury and sites like this one," said **Grace Lee, Children First co-founder**. "We thank Council Member Chin for taking a proactive stance on the health and safety of schoolchildren in New York City. No parent should have to worry about their child being exposed to toxic chemicals while at school."

"Mercury vapor is highly toxic to young children, causing permanent developmental delays and impaired motor skills. With over 200 Brownfield Cleanup Program sites in New York City alone, this legislation is a key step to ensure that school children across New York City are protected from harmful mercury exposure," said **Rebecca Tekula, Children First co-founder**.

"This legislation is the first step in securing stricter safety regulations and reforming the remediation process to protect sensitive receptors like unborn babies, children, and seniors. Children First will continue its advocacy work to ensure the health and wellbeing of the community is put ahead of any developer's blind ambition to turn as high a profit as possible by ignoring obvious health risks," said **Megan Malvern, Children First co-founder**.

“Schools are the heart of our community, the very fabric of public trust. When parents feel that their children’s safety is threatened, those communities can break down. Whether it is mercury, lead, school shootings or resiliency, we must do anything in our power to protect the sanctity of our public schools,” said **Emily Hellstrom, Children First co-founder.**

“We are grateful to Council Member Margaret Chin for introducing important legislation that urges the City set a standard for reviewing the potential for mercury contamination and processes for remediation during development. Assurance of a careful and comprehensive review of all environmental concerns in a neighborhood is critical to protect the health and well being of our communities,” said **Alice Blank, Chair, Environmental Protection Committee, Manhattan Community Board 1.**

The introduction of this legislation comes one month after the passage of Intro 873-A, legislation led by Council Member Chin, which, for the first time, mandates the Department of Education to conduct regular inspections of lead in public schools.

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