

# Newtown Creek Community Advisory Group (CAG) Steering Committee

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James Bowers, MPH, Research Scientist  
New York State Department of Health  
Bureau of Environmental & Occupational Epidemiology  
547 River St.  
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## RE: COMMENTS ON DRAFT DOH NEWTOWN CREEK HEALTH OUTCOMES REVIEW

Dear Mr. Bowers,

We are submitting the following comments on behalf of the Newtown Creek Community Advisory Group (CAG) Steering Committee.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments on the draft health report.

The CAG thanks you and the DOH for your work to investigate potential elevated incidences of certain health outcomes in the communities of Newtown Creek. We also thank you for attending our recent meeting. We also appreciate that the DOH released the report as a DRAFT and held a comment period, as per the NYS DOH's *Approach to Outreach on Environmental Health Issues* guidance document.

**We are however very disappointed and concerned that the draft report significantly downplays the possibility that historic and ongoing pollution sources within the geographic area may have contributed to elevated rates of certain health outcomes in the communities near Newtown Creek.**

We offer the following comments for your consideration:

- 1. Throughout the report, there is little to no discussion of the role that historic and current industrial pollution sources may have contributed to health problems in the communities around Newtown Creek.** For example the report does not discuss the disproportionate burden of environmental health hazards within ½ mile and 1 mile of Newtown Creek, including but not limited to waste transfer stations, highways, state Superfund sites with ongoing vapor intrusion exposures (including carcinogens such as TCE), oil spills, city and state Brownfield sites, RCRA hazardous waste storage facilities, air pollution facilities (such as an incinerator that was shut down because of high dioxin concentrations), petrochemical facilities, etc. **The report should discuss these sources of pollution and the possible cumulative and synergistic effects of exposure to dozens if not hundreds of pollutants over decades, and their possible**

**contributions to increased incidences of disease in the neighborhoods surrounding Newtown Creek.**

2. **The report does not address possible epigenetic effects of exposure to persistent bioaccumulative toxic (PBT) and endocrine disrupting chemicals** such as PCB's and dioxins and furans which are present in the creek, and were undoubtedly released by facilities in the studied geographic area (e.g. the Greenpoint incinerator that was shut down). A growing body of research has shown that some hormone disruptors may have negative effects on generations down the line.
3. The report does not fully discuss or address whether or not some pollutants (e.g. lead, PCB's and dioxins and furans) that have been documented in the study area, have been linked to the very same health problems that were found to be elevated in some cases.
4. On the flip side there is much discussion about the role that socio-economic factors may play in contributing to elevated diseases. **While we do not dispute the fact that these are important risk factors, the report should balance these risk factors with other environmental health risk factors that are very real and present in our communities, and are very much present within the geographic scope of the assessment.** For example, smoking is discussed on no less than 13 separate pages in the report yet PCB's and PAH's are not mentioned once.
5. **Since the report did not evaluate or measure exposures, it is inappropriate for the DOH to conclude that the elevated incidences of health outcomes that were identified cannot be attributed to exposure to pollutants.** The report states that, *"This study's patterns of elevations and deficits of cancer among residents living near Newtown Creek provided no evidence suggesting that cancers in the area were elevated as a result of unusual environmental exposures in the study area."* We feel this is an overstatement since the study did not actually measure or evaluate exposures.
6. **Fish and crab consumption advisories, education and public signage:** While fish and crab consumption advisories are in effect for Newtown Creek and discussed in the report, to date the NYS DOH has done a poor job of engaging fisher-people, fishing shops, sportsmen and sportswomen groups, low-income communities and communities of color in the neighborhoods around Newtown Creek. For example there are Latino and Polish individuals who fish on the creek regularly who may not be familiar with the potential hazards and risks, and who may be bringing contaminated fish home to their families with young children, infants, and/or women of childbearing age. **It is critically important for the NYS DOH to develop a robust community outreach program to educate particularly at risk vulnerable populations about the potential health hazards of eating potentially contaminated fish and crabs from Newtown Creek. Such a program should at a minimum include appropriate signage at key locations where people fish or may fish along the creek. We also strongly recommend DOH review the fish and crab tissue data that has come in from the Phase 1 and Phase 2 remedial investigations and update the fish consumption advisory for Newtown Creek accordingly.**

7. **Finally, the DOH should work with other agencies (e.g. NIOSH) as appropriate to evaluate the risks that current and historic workers who work and worked on and alongside Newtown Creek may face or have faced** as a result of potential exposure to pollutants in the creek, and strategies workers and businesses can take to prevent exposure to such pollutants moving forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio  
New York Assembly Member Joseph Lentol  
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