

The New York Times

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2001

It's Going to Take More Than Elbow Grease

By DEBORAH BALDWIN

LAST Thursday, when Mary Miss and her husband, George Peck, returned to their loft apartment near the disaster site, they took one look around and vowed to return the next day with reinforcements.

The dust was thick and everywhere. Ms. Miss, 57, is an artist who does public art projects. She and Mr. Peck, 60, rounded up friends and armed themselves with masks, Windex, Murphy's Oil Soap, rubber gloves and rags. Then, for safety, they rolled down their sleeves.

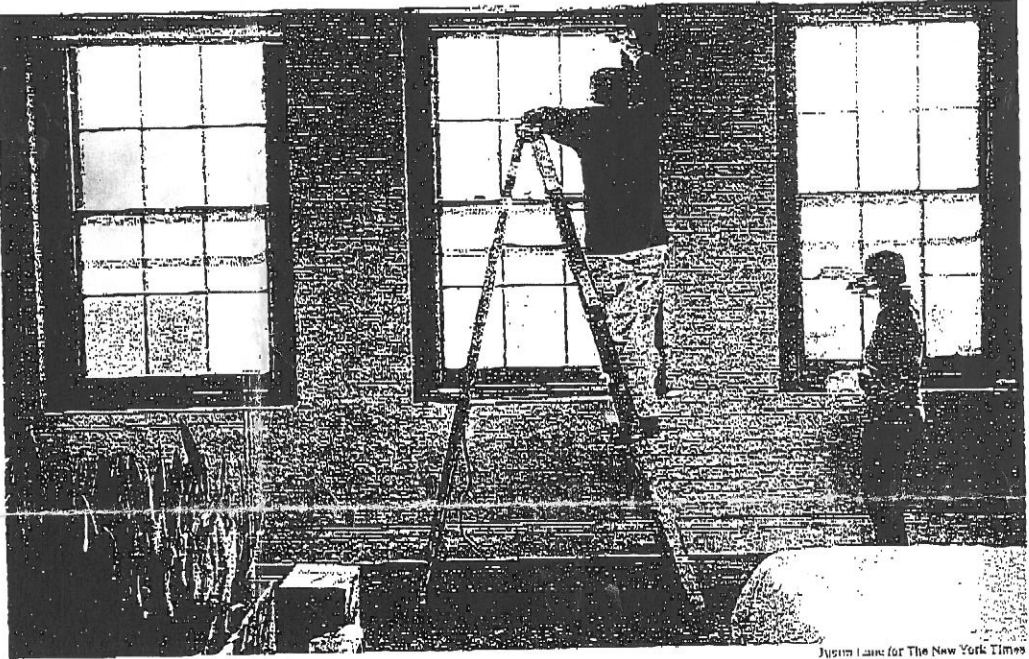
The collapsed towers were only seven blocks away. Ms. Miss said she could see the cloud hovering near the apartment, where she has worked and lived for 31 years.

"You know people are doing all these amazing things to clear that wreckage, and what one is doing with inside is so minor by comparison," she said. "On the other hand, this is your home."

Cleaning up is "the natural reaction," said Damon Gersh, president of Maxons Restorations, alluding to many peoples' desire to bring order into their lives. But in extreme cases, he says, it is "on our list of not-to-dos," explaining that it is best to first consult an insurance broker.

Household vacuum cleaners, sponges and mops tend to rearrange the dust without getting rid of it, he said, and in two days it settles back down, like a stubborn houseguest.

Mr. Gersh, whose company is helping apartment owners, churches and businesses clean up after the disaster, has an unscientific litmus test



Justin Lane for The New York Times

THE TASK George Peck and Mary Miss cleaning their 3,000-square-foot apartment on Greenwich Street.

for those who live south of Canal Street: Run your finger across the coffee table; if it leaves a visible swath and you pick up a white dust mixed with black soot, "it's not a regular cleanup" and requires the help of professionals, he said.

More than 292,000 people live in Manhattan below 14th Street, and

many of them are running their fingers across tables and windowsills — and then standing in line at places like Duane Reade, whose stores below 14th Street report brisk sales of cleaning products.

When the towers collapsed, they generated two million tons of debris, along with an ashy cloud of finely pulverized concrete, gypsum, glass and other materials. Bearing soot from the smoldering fire, the cloud billowed up and around the city and into abandoned apartments with windows left open.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency has said that asbestos has not appeared in the air at dangerous levels. But "the reason people are wearing masks is you are better off not breathing that stuff," said Dr. Kenneth Demerjian, a physical chemist with the E.P.A., referring to the dust cloud.

He has been studying particulate matter in New York since February 2000. Public health standards are based on the size of particulates, and "the bottom line," he said, "is that the human lung would not like to be a filter for high amounts."

Doctors have warned that the fallout irritates eyes and lungs and can aggravate allergies, and they encourage the use of air-conditioners

that recirculate indoor air, catching larger particles in filters boosted by a couple layers of cheesecloth. Anyone cleaning up should wear a mask — a \$3 one will do — and use brooms or vacuums equipped with HEPA filters, said Dr. Ira Finegold, chief of allergy at St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospital.

Preservation experts recommend cleaning family treasures using a vacuum, with its suction on low and its nozzle covered by cheesecloth secured by a rubber band. Their cleaning advice is available at www.heritagepreservation.org.

Insurance policies may cover bigger cleanups. Reach for the phone, not the broom, say Jonathan Held, a partner in American Fire Restoration, and Robert Strongwater, a casualty loss expert, who worked alongside each other after the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. They are back in business in the area. "No. 1," Mr. Held said, "contact your insurance broker; No. 2, keep a good record of anything you're spending; and No. 3, keep a record of damages."

This week Ms. Miss is still cleaning. As water and electricity return to buildings downtown, so will neighbors who have yet to start.

Cleanup Specialists

A NUMBER of companies clean textiles. Clean Bright Process (212-283-8400 or 516-333-7073) charges a minimum of \$125 a visit, \$2.50 a square foot to clean Oriental carpets and \$25 a linear foot for upholstered furniture; there is a surcharge of up to 50 percent for construction-related dust.

The Textile Conservation Workshop (914-763-5805) hand washes delicate and antique fabrics; figure that it will cost about \$400 to clean a queen-size quilt.

Services that specialize in disaster cleanups use refrigerator-

size air cleaners and industrial rubber sponges that trap soot. Maxons Restorations (212-447-6767) estimates that it could finish a 3,000-square-foot loft in three days, with a team of six to 10 employees in masks and goggles; work would include cleaning electronics, artwork, area rugs, curtains and clothes off site, which would take several weeks. Total cost: \$5,000 to \$10,000.

The Robert M. Strongwater Company (718-357-9191) helps estimate damages and carry out repairs. There is a fee for the estimate. **DEBORAH BALDWIN**

Post-it Fax Note 7671

To: Damon Gersh

From: Amy

Date: 9/20/01

of pages: 1

Co./Dept:

Co.:

Phone #: