

9/11 rescuers agree huge compensation deal

November 19 2010, by Paola Messana

More than 10,000 rescue workers sickened by toxic dust and debris after the September 11 attacks Friday accepted a huge 625-million-dollar compensation payout, the government insurer said.

"Over 95 percent of the eligible plaintiffs have accepted a settlement worth at least 625 million dollars in compensation, which will result in the dismissal of their claims," the specially created insurer said in a statement.

Firefighters, police and paramedics as well as construction workers were at the forefront of efforts to rescue people and secure the site after Al-Qaeda militants on two hijacked planes slammed into the World Trade Center on that September day in 2001.

During their long fight for compensation, the responders said they were sickened by the debris and dust thrown up into the air when the twin towers collapsed, killing almost 3,000 people.

A lawyer for the victims, Paul Napoli, welcomed the deal which was agreed with 10,043 plaintiffs, saying the alternative had been an even longer legal battle.

"We negotiated for over two years to achieve this settlement for our clients, which we truly believe is the best result, given the uncertainty of protracted litigation," he said.

Under the deal sealed on Friday, the level of compensation will be

depend on the severity of each individual's illness.

It will also have to be determined how their condition is linked to the work done at the lower Manhattan site now dubbed Ground Zero.

That means someone who does not smoke and contracted a severe respiratory illness, like asthma, within seven months of exposure to Ground Zero can receive between 800,000 and just over a million dollars.

Someone whose cause of death is determined to have been linked to the events of 9/11 could receive about 1.5 million dollars.

"This settlement is a fair and just resolution of these claims, protecting those who came to the aid of this city when we needed it most," said Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

For the deal to go through, a minimum of 95 percent of the more than 10,000 plaintiffs had to accept the package, or there would have been no payment to anyone.

The massive payout of 625 million dollars was a minimum and could go up to "a possible maximum total" of 712.5 million dollars, said Diana Posternsky, from financial communications firm Kest and Company.

Even those who have not yet fallen sick, but fear they might do in the future are entitled to about 3,250 dollars.

The funds will be paid out by the WTC Captive Insurance Company, set up in July 2004 to insure the city of New York and some 140 contractors engaged in the clean-up. It was endowed with a billion dollars in federal funds to pay out compensation claims.

"I hope that this settlement will bring closure to the heroes on both sides of this litigation who did their best to repair this city and restore this community in those difficult days and months following 9/11," said the company's president Christine LaSala.

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Citation: 9/11 rescuers agree huge compensation deal (2010, November 19) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-11-rescuers-million-dollars.html>

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