



Super!

November 2003 *E-MAIL EDITION*

The Superintendents Club of New York is a technical society of multifamily building maintenance personnel. The Super's Credo: For us, work is not just a chance to earn a living. At its best, it is an opportunity to engage in a profession that renders the greatest good to the greatest number of people while giving us the opportunity to derive satisfaction from utilizing all our gifts and skills to the fullest.

Super! is available in a smaller print edition as well as this electronic edition. Club members may elect to receive either or both. This edition is free. Just ask rkoral@citytech.cuny.edu to be added to list.

NOVEMBER MEETINGS → LIGHTING!

At Hostos in the Bronx – 3rd Wednesday (19th)
Jay Street in Brooklyn – 4th Tuesday (25th)

Our speaker is Mitchell Gross, President of Bradbern Lighting Corp., a corporate member of the Club. Many of us know Mitch well because he comes to the meetings and has learned what our members are interested in.

Learn about the latest in lighting equipment that must function in blackouts, about the latest in energy-efficient lamps – fluorescents and compacts that can reduce electricity costs by up to 50 % -- and the sensors and motion detectors that are being installed in apartment buildings.

Bronx:

Take 2, 4 or 5 to 149th St. – Grand Concourse stop. Go to East Academic Complex building, 450 Grand Concourse, Room C390 (3rd floor) Starts at 6:00 p.m.

Brooklyn:

We meet in SUS space at 408 Jay St., 3rd floor, between Fulton and Willoughby Streets. Snack, socialize at 5:30 p.m., formal meeting at 6:00. Near A,C,F Jay St. station.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS! The Supers Club **annual festive holiday meeting** will take place on Friday evening, **Dec. 5th**, from 5:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. in the Garden Room of Judson Memorial Church, on Thompson Street, around the corner from 55 Washington Square South, Manhattan (same location as last year).

Get in the holiday spirit! Bring your family (kids, too) and best friends! There will be awards, gifts, drawings for real prizes, music, food and beverages.

The area is Greenwich Village. It's right next to NYU. It's a block from the W 4th St. station of the A and F trains. (Exit at the downtown end.)

More directions?

Go to <http://www.judson.org/directions.htm>

Mold Workshop – “A great day!”

Members of the Bronx Chapter were more than pleased with the mold workshop they attended on Saturday, October 18th at the Trade Winds facility in Nassau County. “The instructor, Chris Siniuk,” said Bronx Director Roberto Cardona, “seems to know the trade like the back of his hand.”

Members left the course well informed on the topics of health effects of fungi, personal protection equipment, mold remediation, record keeping for mold, as well as New York City guidelines.

Afterward, Cardona spoke with Phillip McLaughlin, Trade Winds vice president for catastrophe response, who showed great interest in the Supers Club. He indicated that the company could provide courses on lead paint, indoor air quality, and asbestos.

“They treated us to pizza and sodas, after which they took us on a tour of their facilities that included trucks, speedboats, and all-terrain boats used to clean wildlife that get caught in oil spills.

“All in all, our day was great!”

“Educate Your Tenants,” He Said

The Club's October meeting featured a very informative talk and slide presentation by veteran teacher, Mark Russo. Mark was quite at home at Cornell University Cooperative Extension in midtown Manhattan, from which he had retired only the month before.

As is so often the case with recent retirees, Mark says he is now busier than before. One chore that keeps him busy is as a teacher of small landlords in the education program of NYC's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD).

Two classes of people are generally unprepared to participate in the city's multifamily buildings: the landlords and the tenants. “Newbie” landlords are shocked by the problems of running buildings in the most regulated

industry in the world. As for the tenants, so many understand so very little about the apartments they inhabit. The combination of the two is at the heart of a lot of the problems in housing.

Mark's message to the supers focused on the role they might play in educating their tenants. As hard as it is for some to comprehend, most tenants have no idea, for instance, how expensive water now is. So they do not report running toilets or dripping faucets. The result can put the building's finances in the red, with all its consequences to the super's job. Another item cited was ignorance of the function of the basket strainer in the sink. Some tenants will, when it fills, turn it upside down and attempt to flush its contents down the drain, clogging it and creating more maintenance work. The list goes on and on.

[Tenant education is difficult. *Super!* would like to hear of successful attempts from its readers.]

Light and Heat

By Glen Stoltz, Webmaster

The Supers Club is all about providing light and heat. After all, this is what we do as supers, handypersons and other building maintenance workers. Our primary job is to do what we can do to keep our residents surrounded with the basics of life: heat, hot water, lights. Keep 'em warm and dry. Only the good stuff.

This publication, in tandem with our website, helps us interact with the general public by providing light and heat of another kind. We shed light on issues of concern to our members, friends and readers. If we do things right we provide more light than heat. Because we're not trying to create friction, but lessen it, and at the same time find an opportunity to share with each other our experience and knowledge.

Property managers, other building maintenance workers, property owners, and just plain tenants, all need to see our points of view, to hear what we hear and feel what we feel. To walk a mile in super shoes, if you will.

We have a feature on our website we call "ASK A SUPER QUESTION".

Visitors to the website can ask just about anything on their minds (Wow! Do they ever!) by posting it to the website. Sometimes funny. Sometimes infuriating. Sometimes annoying and frustrating, but always provoking further thought and discussion.

Which is where the answers come in. Someone wrote this a few weeks ago:

Our lease is up 9/30/03. We notified the landlord that we would not be renewing and were told that we must paint the entire apartment, or they would paint and charge us. There is no damage to the paint other than normal wear & tear. We are willing to paint the damaged wall but not the whole apartment. Can the landlord withhold our security deposit?

Now, most of us who are supers already know the answer to that question, and we did get some thoughtful, cogent responses. However, someone wrote this:

It is not your responsibility to keep your landlord's property in good condition. It is his. And also for example, if your light bulb burns out you can call your landlord about it, then he would have to be the one to replace it.

Yes, dear reader, that's a direct quote. Are you kidding me? Is this person serious?

Of course it has occurred to us that this writer IS joking. Or is trying to stick it to landlords everywhere by disseminating bad information, because of a simmering hate for them. But this is the kind of obvious gross misrepresentation of the truth that we want to keep OFF the website. Yes, we want to keep it light, but we want to keep the light, too -- maintaining a learning environment where people from all walks of life can come for solid information and helpful answers.

And indeed, we can do much to combat the misinformation, half-truths and outright lies that come our way, both about us as building maintenance workers in particular and about our chosen profession and fields of endeavor in general. Call them teachable moments, or whatever you want to call them, but, given the right moment and venue, we all have a story to tell, because we all have specialized smarts and myriad experiences.

There are times when we will be called upon to share our wealth of knowledge. Are you ready?

Come, use our website! That's what it's there for. Learn something. Teach something. all means, share your experience and knowledge when you can. If an answer (please note, AN answer, not THE answer – since many questions have more than one good answer) to a question presents itself to you, you are invited to share it with our website visitors, our members and friends, and our community of property maintenance workers.

Share your wealth of knowledge and experiences with the rest of us. Teach. Educate. Instruct. Train. Communicate. Impart. Inculcate. Instill. Edify. Enlighten. Coach. Tutor. Mentor. And you just might learn something yourself.

Some Legal Jargon for Supers

By Peter Grech, President

Occasionally, the superintendent is required to appear in court as a witness on behalf of the building. The legal jargon can be confusing. Here are some definitions of the legal terms.

These are intended as general information. As always, if any legal questions arise, it's best to seek out an attorney.

Adjournment: An order of the court for a temporarily halt of the proceedings in a given case at either party's request

or for the court's own reason. The judge sets a date for the parties to return to continue the proceeding.

Default: Failure to appear in court or to fulfill an agreement. A default by either party can result in a judgment in their opponent's favor

Inquest: A one-sided court proceeding that allows a party to present his or her case to the judge without the opponent present. A party may conduct an inquest if the opposing party fails to appear in court as instructed.

Mediation: The process through which court-appointed mediators assist parties in a legal dispute to make a mutually fair voluntary agreement and to understand its terms and conditions.

Order to Show Cause: A legal document used to initiate a special proceeding, or to request the entry or the return of a case to the court calendar. Among other reasons, tenants may request an Order to Show Cause to hold owners accountable for defaulting on an agreement, request more time to pay arrears, or to stop an eviction. The order has the effect of staying the proceeding from going forward and keeps the parties in the same position.

Petition: A legal document that sets out the petitioner's claim for judicial relief.

Petitioner: The party who initiates the case.

Pro-Se: This Latin term means "by yourself" and refers to parties in a legal dispute that represent themselves in court, without legal counsel

Rent Abatement: A one-time reduction in rent to compensate tenants for an owner's failure to make repairs after the court orders or stipulates them. (See "Stipulation" below.)

Respondent: The party in a court case who must answer the special proceeding begun by the petitioner.

Stipulation: A court document that lists the terms and conditions of an agreement between a tenant and an owner.

Three-Day Notice: Refers to the amount of time tenants have to pay arrears after receiving a written or verbal request for payment from the owner. If a tenant fails to pay arrears after three days, the owner may initiate legal action against the tenant.

Traverse Hearing: A court hearing held to determine whether a party properly served court papers to another party.

Warrant of Eviction: A legal document that empowers a marshal to remove a tenant from an apartment after the appropriate five-day notice expires. Only the marshal's office may serve and execute a Warrant of Eviction.

With Prejudice: When a petitioner gives up the right to seek further legal action at a later date. If a case is discontinued with prejudice, it may not be brought again.

Without Prejudice: When the petitioner reserves the right to seek further legal action at a later date. If a case is discontinued without prejudice, it may be brought again.

*Ill fares the building,
To hastening ills a prey;
With maintenance deferred,
There's rapid decay.*

(A take-off on Sir Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village.")

At Our Expo Booth Last Month

"Had a great time and met lots of interested folks and associations. Your boys were a special treat. Thanks again," writes John Cockerill of www.exqheat.com

Note by Dick Koral, Editor: Mr. Cockerill was one of many visitors at our booth at the NYARM EXPO at Pier 92 on Tuesday, October 21. Their interest in, and enthusiasm for, the Supers Club made the chore of "minding the store" a pleasure. Attending were Peter Grech, president; Gene Marabello, past president, Jose Rivera, vice president and yours truly. You may find a visit to the Web address above most interesting.

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(the articles that follow appear only in this e-mail edition of Super!

City's Tunnel Vision

By Greg Gittrich, *Daily News* Staff Writer, Tuesday, October 7th, 2003

THERE IS NOT A SPECK OF NATURAL LIGHT 600 feet beneath the surface of the city. Inside a mammoth tunnel cut through the same bedrock that anchors Manhattan's skyline, a boring machine bites away at the face of a stone wall. The job is complex and exceedingly dangerous.

For 16 hours a day, tunnel workers — sandhogs — haul granite away by the ton. Water drips from the ceiling and gathers under workers' rubber soles. It is water that brings them here, to Tunnel No. 3.

New York — its faucets and hydrants, fountains and toilets — consumes 1.3 billion gallons of water a day. But the complex network of tubes, aqueducts and pipes that carry the water from upstate is aging.

City Water Tunnel No. 3, a feat of modern engineering that has been compared with the Great Wall of China, is what officials hope will keep the water flowing. The 24-foot-wide tunnel eventually will stretch more than 60 miles, creating a new lifeline to faraway reservoirs.

Carved through the deepest core of the city, the musty tunnel holds dozens of workers. Like midgets working in a world scaled for giants, they trudge through ankle-deep water and tear into the rock, far from the city streets above.

Jamming Fear

It is too deep for rats. The eerie silence is broken by the sounds of heavy drills and the immense boring machine. The new tube will allow Tunnels No. 1 and No. 2 to be inspected and repaired for the first time since water began rushing through them in the early 1900s.

If either Tunnel No. 1 or 2 hemorrhages before most of the new tunnel is activated, the city could suffer a catastrophic loss of water.

"The blackout was about 30 hours," a veteran sandhog told the *Daily News* yesterday during a rare tour of the tube. "You can recover when the lights come on. If one of the tunnels failed, you'd be without water for one year or more."

City engineers are concerned enough about the old tunnels that they will not close valves in the tubes, fearing the fixtures could jam shut, sandhogs said. At a cost of \$5.5 billion to \$6 billion, Tunnel No. 3 is the largest capital construction project in city history. Work began in 1970 and is not scheduled to be completed until 2020. Until then, officials are hoping

the two old tunnels will hold up. The possibility that one or both of the aging tubes could bust has been known to city officials since 1954.

"We have been very lucky up until now that we haven't had a breakdown," said Ed Koch, who as mayor in the 1970s and 1980s continued funding Tunnel No. 3 despite massive city budget woes. "You can live without food for many weeks. You can't live without water for many days."

No one knows for sure how long Tunnels No. 1 and 2 will hold together. But failure is not believed to be imminent. Then there is the threat of terrorism.

"I'd like to say it's not a reality, but just looking at the past, it could happen," said a sandhog from Local 147. "If they attacked one of the tunnels ... it would definitely cause a major impact."

Battles over money and community opposition had slowed the progress of Tunnel No. 3 for years.

A Priority Project

But Mayor Bloomberg, who recently descended into the tunnel, has made its completion a priority and is credited by sandhogs for keeping work on track. Officials with the city's Department of Environmental Protection, which is in charge of the project, declined to comment last night.

Twenty-four miles of Tunnel No. 3 have been cut into the earth. There has been one death for every mile dug — 23 workers and a boy who fell down a 500-foot shaft in 1991.

"We've been pretty lucky lately," a sandhog said. "The Mole has improved safety."

The Mole is what the sandhogs call the boring machine. Dynamite is still used to blast giant shafts into the ground, and explosives are needed to create bases at the bottom of the holes. But the brunt of the tunnel is excavated by The Mole. The machine is lowered into the shaft in pieces and assembled at the bottom. Armed with 19-inch, rotating steel teeth, The Mole cuts through an average of 50 feet a day — more than twice the rate of outdated blasting and drilling methods.

"The Mole takes the beating, rather than the man," a worker said. "It's much safer."

As The Mole moves forward, a conveyor belt shuttles rubble to a railway, which brings the debris to the shaft so it can be raised to the surface. The workers are lowered into the tunnel and pulled back into daylight inside an orange metal cage. When a stretch is complete, the walls are covered with a layer of concrete. At the tunnel's darkest end, someone has painted "Give It Hell" on the rock.

Giuliani Tribute

Tunnel No. 3 is designed in four stages. A 13-mile stretch, running through bedrock 250 to 800 feet below the streets, was completed in 1998. Beginning at Hillview Reservoir in Yonkers, the tube runs down Central Park to Fifth Ave. and 78th St. It then turns east, moving under the East River and into Astoria, Queens. The reservoir water is pulled through the tunnel by gravity.

When the first phase was activated, then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani touted Tunnel No. 3 as "one of the most complex and intricate engineering projects in the world."

"This tunnel deserves to be recognized around the world as a wonder of modern engineering," Giuliani said in 1998.

The remaining stages of Tunnel No. 3 are expected to be completed by 2020. Stage 2 is vital. Its two legs — one in Brooklyn and Queens and another in Manhattan — should be activated before the end of the decade at a cost of about \$1.5 billion. When completed, the city can inspect and make any necessary repairs to Tunnels No. 1 and 2.

In a design update, water valves for Tunnel No. 3 will be held in underground chambers so they can be easily assessed. The largest of the chambers is at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx. It sits 250 feet underground and will control 90% of the city's drinking water.

"Super Supers" Recognized



Beulah Super, Felipe Rodriguez (left) receiving special recognition award, with Angela Littlejohn-Swan, Senior Asset Manager, ESIC.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 29, 2003 – The Enterprise Foundation and its affiliate, Enterprise Social Investment Corporation, conducted a grand event at "The Top of the Times" on West 43rd Street to

recognize and honor the excellent work of superintendents who work in affordable housing buildings that Enterprise helped to create.

There was food and drink, and Enterprise officers addressed the supers and their guests, expressing their indebtedness to the personnel that preserve their investments.

Following are those "honored" and those who were specially recognized. In the latter category were Felipe Rodriguez, president of the Beulah Superintendents which recently affiliated with the Supers Club, and Dick Koral, Club secretary-treasurer, the only non-super in that group, for "professional development."

The honorees and their nominators were:

German Alvarado, Oceanhill Brownsville Tenants Assn., and MHR Management, Inc.; Heriberto Ascencio, Brooklyn Neighborhood Improvement Assn., and Dougert Management Corp.; Elvis Blackman, Palladia, Inc., and Lemle & Wolf, Inc.; Roberto Castro, K & R Realty Management; Dennis Clark, Vanguard Urban Improvement Assn. Inc., and MHR Management; Victor Deliz, Brooklyn Neighborhood Improvement Assn. and Dougert Management Co.; Faud Gjonbalaj, Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty; Carl Harvey, East New York Partnership, Rental & Management Associates, Corp.; Mark Joyner, Brooklyn Neighborhood Improvement Assn. and Dougert Management Corp.; Elmo Lugo, Lutheran Social Services of New York; Juan Marti, ECDO Management Corp.; Steve Meade, K & R Realty Management; Ken Mingo, Brooklyn Neighborhood Improvement Assn. and Dougert Management Co.; Ramon Moraldo, Vanguard Urban Improvement Assn. and MHR Management Inc.; Clyde M. Murray, Vanguard Urban Improvement Assn. and MHR Management Inc.; Luis Osario, Palladia, Inc. and Lemle & Wolff, Inc.; Rat Owens, Brooklyn Neighborhood Improvement Assn. and Dougert Management Co.; Marco Padilla, El Barrio's Operation Fightback, Inc.; Jeremiah M. Paul, Vanguard Urban Improvement Assn. Inc., and MHR Management; Jose Perez, LESC House, Inc. (Mr. Perez died on the weekend before.); Jorge Rivera, Palladia, Inc. and Lemle & Wolff, Inc.; Benjamin Springer, Community League of the Heights; Gilbert Torres, LESC House, Inc.; Thurman Ward, LESC House, Inc.; Jerome Wilson, Bronx Pro Real Estate Management, Inc.; and Jin Qian Yin, Asian Americans for Equity.

Those receiving "Special Recognition" and their nominators were:

Anthony Charles, Community Access, Inc.; Jose Cruz, Fordham Bedford Housing Corp.; Ernest Edwards, Palladia, Inc. and Lemle & Wolff, Inc.; Tony Garcia, Fordham Bedford Housing Corp.; Norvene James, Bronx Housing Investment Group and Rental & Management Associates; Flavio Luciano, Fordham Bedford Housing Corp.; Juan Nichols, Fordham Bedford Housing Corp.; Iris Prieto, Fordham Bedford Housing Corp.; Felipe Rodriguez, Beulah HDFC, Inc. and Rental & Management Associates, Corp.; Normand Sears, ECDO Management Corp.; and

Ruben Velez, Fordham Bedford Housing Corp.



Dick Koral receiving award for Supers Professional Development from Beth O'Larey, Vice President for asset management in the New York office of Enterprise Social Investment Corporation.

HPD COURSE 303.1: ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FOR OWNERS/MANAGERS (6 course hours)

This six hour, two-session seminar is part of an effort to educate property owners/managers and housing professionals about common environmental hazards found in the home. Emphasis is placed on those environmental hazards that have serious effects on children's health such as lead-based paint, mold, mildew, roach and rodent infestation.

The sessions are conducted by Certified Environmental Trainers and will focus on the following topics:

- Lead-based paint interim controls, rehabilitation, maintenance and renovation;
- Mold and Mildew;
- Vermin, including roaches and rodents;
- Asbestos;
- Fire prevention;
- Accident prevention;
- Low cost remediation and abatement techniques.

This Seminar is held several times a month at 100 Gold Street, (Manhattan). To register, please call (212) 863-8830 for an application form or [register on-line using HEP's On-Line Course Application](#).

Pre-requisite: None

160,000 Said to Be Dying Yearly from Global Warming

By Alister Doyle

MOSCOW, Sept 30 (Reuters) - About 160,000 people die every year from side-effects of global warming ranging from malaria to malnutrition and the numbers could almost double by 2020, a group of scientists said on Tuesday.

The study, by scientists at the World Health Organization (WHO) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said children in developing nations seemed most vulnerable.

"We estimate that climate change may already be causing in the region of 160,000 deaths...a year," Professor

Andrew Haines of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine told a climate change conference in Moscow.

"The disease burden caused by climate change could almost double by 2020," he added, even taking account of factors like improvements in health care. He said the estimates had not been previously published.

Most deaths would be in developing nations in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, which would be hardest hit by the spread of malnutrition, diarrhoea and malaria in the wake of warmer temperatures, floods and droughts.

"These diseases mainly affect younger age groups, so that the total burden of disease due to climate change appears to be borne mainly by children in developing countries," Haines said.

Milder winters, however, might mean that people would live longer on average in Europe or North America despite risks from heat waves this summer in which about 15,000 people died in France alone.

Haines said the study suggested climate change could "bring some health benefits, such as lower cold-related mortality and greater crop yields in temperate zones, but (that) these will be greatly outweighed by increased rates of other diseases".

Russia is hosting a World Climate Change Conference this week to discuss how to rein in emissions of gases like carbon dioxide from factories and cars that scientists blame for blanketing the planet and nudging up temperatures.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who opened the conference on Monday, suggested in jest that global warming could benefit countries like Russia as people "would spend less money on fur coats and other warm things".

But Putin also backed away from Russia's earlier pledge to swiftly ratify the key Kyoto pact on curbing global warming, a plan that will collapse without Moscow's backing.

He told 940 delegates to the conference Russia was closely studying the issue of Kyoto. "A decision will be taken when this work is finished," he said, giving no timetable.

Haines said small shifts in temperatures, for instance, could extend the range of mosquitoes that spread malaria. Water supplies could be contaminated by floods, for instance, which could also wash away crops.

More Dilapidated Housing, Less Code Enforcement

by Joe Lamport, Gotham Gazette, October 10, 03

JUST A FEW BLOCKS UP from what was Edgar Allen Poe's cottage in the north Bronx, people are living in a nightmare that might be worthy of one of his tales. And the city's efforts to end it, according to the tenants, are basically useless.

The nightmare is 2874 Grand Concourse, one of the majestic buildings that line the Grand Concourse - majestic at least from the outside.

For almost a year, tenants have been dodging plaster falling from their ceilings and rats in the hallways. They have pleaded with the city to force the landlord to clean up mold, fix a door that allows free access to the roof and replace an antiquated electrical system that leaves many in the dark almost every day. They have caught prostitutes and drug dealers in their hallways conducting business.

City housing inspectors have slapped almost 350 violations on the building. But that has done little to actually get the building repaired - even for the about 80 violations deemed "immediately hazardous" and that theoretically should be corrected with 24 hours.

"They're just coming but nothing's done," said Judith Freeman, the tenant's association president at 2874 Grand Concourse. "There are no results - nothing happens."

Freeman and her neighbors are not the only tenants in the city complaining about passive code enforcement. A new [report](#) (In PDF format) by the Association for Neighborhood Housing and Development (ANHD) sponsored by the city's Public Advocate's office, concludes that in the areas that need it most, code enforcement involves little more than writing notes to landlords to please fix their buildings.

The report, released this month and coinciding with hearings on a City Council bill to alter city housing inspections, indicates that people in certain parts of the city are living in dilapidated buildings that are actually getting worse.

The worst housing conditions are in low-income and minority neighborhoods in the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn and Upper Manhattan. The housing code is simply not being enforced strictly where it's needed most, the report concluded.

Astrid Andre, policy director at the ANHD and author of the report, said the group had undertaken its report because the organizations making up its membership had different impressions of housing conditions in their areas than officials at the city's housing department. Despite an overall improvement, housing in some areas has not gotten better and, in fact, has gotten worse.

"Our members were telling us there was a stagnation, a deterioration," Andre said. "We just documented what our members were telling us."

The agency that inspects housing in the city, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), downplayed the report.

"Between 1996 and 1999, in the majority of the low income neighborhoods, the numbers were trending in the right direction," said Carol Abrams, assistant commissioner for communications at the department. But when pressed to explain one of the report's findings - an almost 14 percent increase in code violations issued by the agency in the Bronx between 1999 and 2002 - Abrams said she had "no idea."

"There will always be fluctuations," she said. "It's a tenant-driven complaint system."

Overall, Abrams said, the U.S. Census Bureau's Housing Vacancy Survey, conducted every three years, showed the city's housing stock was improving. "The dilapidation rate in 2002 was the lowest than at any other point in the history of the survey," she said.

City Councilmember Joel Rivera, who represents the area where 2874 Grand Concourse sits, said it is unfortunately a building like many others in the Bronx.

"In my district alone, there are a ton of buildings that are in trouble," said Rivera "You don't have to be an inspector to see certain problems.

"The problem in the Bronx is that we have only six full-time inspectors for the entire borough," Rivera said. "The follow-up is not very good because we have so many buildings."

Adding housing inspectors is just one of several recommendations in the new report. Tenants and advocates would also like to see the city housing department impose and collect fines more readily, more aggressively pursue problem landlords and empower tenants by allowing them to petition the department for roof-to-cellar inspections.

Under its current approach, housing inspectors respond only to tenant complaints to its hotline - almost 400,000 annually. But they often walk by glaring problems like broken windows or unlocked front doors because no one complained about them, advocates said.

City Council's new legislation would change that. Intro 400A, as it is called, would allow tenants to petition the city housing department for comprehensive building inspections. The department ought to do such inspections on a cyclical basis in neighborhoods where buildings are dilapidated, the report recommended.

Abrams insisted that the city deploys inspectors in the most efficient fashion, but she declined to respond to questions about that

system, instead referring a reporter to the recent testimony of city officials at the City Council public hearing on Intro 400A. The officials said changing the law would not improve things at all.

In their testimony, officials were short on details. They said that inspectors respond to individual complaints and then, through follow up, the complaints are evaluated and analyzed to develop "comprehensive" plans to resolve repair problems.

But Rivera said the department's approach has to change.

"From what I've seen in my own community, the current system does not work," he said. "It's really not the fault of (the city housing department). The administration must invest more in (the city housing department)."

As for the nightmare on the Grand Concourse, its end seems to be approaching, but only after its tenants organized, hauled the landlord into court - and got Councilmember Rivera, their representative, and Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum to visit the building with an entourage of reporters in tow.

Their months of complaints to the city housing department had led only to a \$500 fine of the landlord for heat and hot water problems, despite periods as long as a week last winter without any heat or hot water. A Housing Court case for repairs is ongoing and Freeman, the tenant's association president, said she is hoping that the building is taken over by an independent administrator who will apply rents to making repairs. The landlord, Moshe Pillar, could not be reached for comment.

"I really think the only reason they are coming back to follow up now is because Rivera and the public advocate got involved," Freeman said. "We got the \$500 fine, but think of all the months we've got to go."

Joe Lamport is the assistant director of the City-Wide Task Force on Housing Court, a coalition of community housing organizations.

Working to Develop the Volkswagen of Solar Homes

By Amanda Griscom, Grist Magazine, 07 Oct 2003

JUST OFF I-75 IN TENNESSEE, halfway between Knoxville and Chattanooga, past a Home Depot, a Ford dealership, a Krispy Kreme, and a Piggly Wiggly supermarket, there is a newly developed tract of low-income homes built by volunteers of Habitat for Humanity.

At first glance, nothing about the development seems out of the ordinary. The houses are pleasant one-story

colonials with porches, shutters, and carefully trimmed lawns strewn with tricycles and kick balls. But upon closer inspection, the development turns out to be more than just another housing project in sprawling Middle America; it is a testing ground for the affordable, zero-energy homes of the future.

The most obvious clue to the larger picture -- a two-kilowatt BP Millennia thin-film solar system -- can be seen glinting on the rooftop of the home of Adam Indrajaya and Lina Kinandjar, a landscape worker and pastry decorator, respectively, who moved to Tennessee from Malaysia six years ago. The solar panels were provided by the Tennessee Valley Authority (the public electricity supplier throughout the seven-state region of the Southeast) and the U.S. Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory (located just miles away in Oak Ridge, Tenn.), which teamed up with Habitat for Humanity to build this experimental settlement.

Even more impressive than the rooftop installation is the Oak Ridge-designed technology beneath it: special insulated walls, windows, and floors; energy-efficient lighting, appliances, and ducting; and state-of-the-art systems for heating, air conditioning, and hot water. The laboratory also added more esoteric efficiency measures, such as a system that captures the heat from shower water after it goes down the drain, and even one that captures the warmth that comes off the coils behind the fridge.

Implanted throughout the house are dozens of sensors that monitor every detail of the family's energy use -- and with a large-screen TV, surround-sound stereo and DVD, fish aquariums, and two young kids who have better things to think about than closing the front door and turning out the lights, the Indrajaya-Kinandjar family's living habits are no more energy-conscious than that of an average family in the U.S. (In fact, the couple had never heard of energy efficiency or solar panels before they discovered that Habitat selected their house "to get a special treatment," as Kinandjar put it.)

Yet the family consumes roughly 25 kilowatts of electricity a day -- less than half the 60-kilowatt average in the U.S. And whether they intend to or not, the couple may be setting a lifestyle precedent for thousands, and perhaps millions, of others nationwide. Oak Ridge is working with the DOE to come up with a prototype house that, by 2010, will cost the same to build as a conventional middle-class home while being 50 to 70 percent more efficient and functioning as a net-zero-energy home (meaning it can produce as much energy per year as it consumes). "Right now, all too frequently, the typical solar home is something akin to a customized Cadillac," said Jeff Christian, director of the Buildings Technology Center at Oak Ridge and the man in charge of the Habitat for Humanity project. "What we're trying to do is come up with the Volkswagen of net-zero-energy homes."

This goal has powerful and far-reaching implications -- not just for addressing America's escalating power demand,

but also for controlling that of developing countries, which are expected to experience dramatic growth in home-building and energy demand in the next several decades. But there are significant barriers to making the net-zero vision a reality, not the least of which is the Bush administration's efforts to slash federal investments in energy efficiency, renewables, and zero-energy homes by roughly half since it came to power. (Funding for Zero Energy Building projects alone would be cut from \$8 million to \$4 million by the current Bush plan.) To meet the 2010 goal, according to Christian, the country will have to see a steep reduction in the price of solar, from roughly \$15,000 to \$18,000 dollars for a typical (two-kilowatt) system today to about \$3,000 to \$5,000 for that same system in seven years.

No small feat -- but if consumer demand continues to grow, and if Congress passes a Renewable Portfolio Standard (incorporating a benchmark set in the 2002 Senate version of the energy bill that called for 10 percent renewables by 2020), and if we get a different president in office who will sign off on it, the goal would be eminently reachable. Granted, all those "ands" make the forecast cloudy at best, but still, there is a ray of hope: In the absence of federal-level support, there is a steadily growing effort among traditional utilities -- and, more importantly, their customers -- to bring renewables into their energy mix. In Tennessee, this trend is exemplified by the involvement of the oldest and largest public utility of them all, TVA.

I Want My TVA

To be sure, TVA is a far cry from an eco-sensitive outfit. On the contrary: It is infamous for being one of the top polluters in the nation, deriving more than 60 percent of its power from coal-fired plants (most of them dinosaurs) and the remainder largely from nuclear. But in the last two years, pressured by a growing concern for the failing environmental health of the Tennessee Valley, TVA has added nearly 3 megawatts of wind, solar, and methane gas capacity (and is in the process of adding about 27 MW more of wind capacity) for its "Green Power Switch" program, which offers customers the option of paying a monthly premium for solar- and wind-generated electricity. TVA's program was the first in the country to allow consumers to pay extra for renewable energy; the energy is accredited (that is, guaranteed to be clean) by an outside organization called the Center for Resource Solutions). Thirty MW may not sound like much, given that TVA's total capacity is 30,000 MW, but it's a lot more than we're seeing from most other utilities.

"They resisted the idea at first," said Steven Smith, director of the Southern Alliance For Clean Energy, which was the driving force in helping TVA develop the program. "They simply couldn't believe that people would pay more every month for clean energy. But it's been a tremendous

success, and is becoming the gold standard for other programs like it throughout the South."

In just two years, more than 7,000 residential customers (out of 3.4 million total accounts) in the Tennessee Valley have signed up for the program, making it one of the biggest in the nation in terms of both participants and capacity. Sixty-four of TVA's 158 distributors are cooperating, and there's a waiting list of many more. As a result of the unexpectedly positive response, TVA has launched another program called Generation Partners, which offers homeowners the option of installing their own rooftop solar system or windmill and selling the electricity generated back to TVA for 15 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh), more than twice the going rate for traditionally generated juice. The Indrajaya-Kinandjar house is the flagship project -- the first private residence in the Southeast selling pollution-free solar electricity back to the grid.

Is That the Chattanooga Choo-Choo?

That flagship project has been a long time coming: The Southeast is one of the last regions in the country to catch on to the renewables trend, according to Smith. "Compared to costal regions like California and the Northeast, utilities in the Southeast have been really reluctant to invest in renewables," he said. In part, that's because of the preponderance of coal in the region's energy mix, which has famously given the South some of the cheapest electricity in the nation -- about 6 to 7 cents per kWh, compared to an average of 10 to 12 cents elsewhere. That low price makes renewables even less cost-competitive than they are in other parts of the country. Furthermore, environmental organizations have far less of a presence in the South than they do elsewhere -- and those that do exist tend to be less well-funded than their counterparts in other places, because the region also suffers from a lack of environmentally minded foundations.

In the last five years, Nashville, Memphis, and Chattanooga (all located in the Tennessee Valley) have made it onto the list of the most polluted cities in the country. What's more, the area's Great Smoky Mountains National Park has become the most polluted national park in the United States -- earning its name in more ways than one. But, on the upside, these problems are driving people to seek solutions. "We are seeing a very clear correlation between the people who sign up for the Green Power Switch and people who live in the areas surrounding the park," said Smith. "They are very clearly saying, 'We are willing to pay more for our electricity in order to help clean up the region.'"

The operative phrase here, of course, is "willing to pay more." TVA makes no bones about the fact that its renewables programs are not charity cases. "These programs depend on people who have the desire and resources to pay the extra increments it costs to add renewable generating capacity to our mix," said Skila

Harris, who served in the DOE during the Clinton administration and is now codirector of TVA. "Alternative-fuels technology really haven't yet proven to be something we can do and keep our rates as low as feasible. And offering the lowest rates possible is the No. 1 priority at TVA."

Ed Colston, marketing manager at TVA and director of the Generation Partners program, puts it more bluntly: "We are not trying to change the world," he said, "we're just trying to make that option available -- in a way that makes practical sense for our bottom line." To wit, the Generation Partners program is nearly cost-free for TVA. They are putting no money whatsoever into marketing the program, relying instead on grassroots environmental organizations like the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy to spread the word among their constituents. And while TVA did donate the solar panels for the Habitat house, it was simply for the sake of demonstration; in all subsequent projects, the homeowner will have to pay for the system.

"We are appealing to a constituency out there that would be putting solar and wind on their homes anyway," said Colston. Still, the program has its advantages: For those who do want to add renewables to their home, TVA makes the process much quicker and easier -- addressing safety concerns with local distributors and smoothing out the technical issues related to interconnecting the system to the grid (which can be a tedious and time-intensive challenge with some utilities). Plus, TVA sweetens the deal by buying back the home's solar energy at a premium rate.

That's more incentive than most utilities offer. But in the long run, it may be as good a deal for TVA as it is for the customer: The Generation Partners program is an easy alternative to adding solar to the Green Power Switch program. Because it has cost TVA almost 10 times more to install solar projects than to build wind farms, the utility has basically abandoned the former in favor of the latter. "We will essentially pay less to help these homeowners add the solar generation themselves than we would to go and build those projects ourselves," said Colston. Right now, of TVA's roughly 30 MW renewables capacity, 0.5 MW is solar-generated.

Steven Smith does find it somewhat perturbing that TVA is so doggedly bottom-line-oriented in its approach to renewables, but still, he said, the program represents a major step forward.

"On the one hand, it frustrates me that customers have to elect to buy clean energy, and yet when TVA adds, say, a new nuke plant, which has huge up-front costs, they just stick that into the base rate and increase the bills without asking," said Smith. On the other hand, he notes, proving that a profit-driven model can work is itself incredibly useful: "You have to crawl before you walk and walk before you run, and TVA is the first one crawling. They've taken a powerful leadership role in the South. Because of their example, we now see utilities in nearby Southern states, including North Carolina and Georgia, adding

similar green-power programs." TVA has proved to everyone the most important point of all: Customers want it, and they're willing to pay for it.

You Turn Me On

It's true that TVA is playing an instrumental role in tapping the all-important well of early adopters. Your own loyal Grist columnist is a Nashville resident and a member of the Green Power Switch program, so I can vouch for the fact that becoming an "early adopter" was as easy as dialing seven digits and saying (or zealously shouting, in my case): "I want to make the Green Power Switch!"

It only costs me an extra \$12 a month to get nearly all of my electricity needs powered by TVA's wind farms and solar installations. I consider those to be about the 12 most satisfying bucks I drop each month. But then again, I'm an energy nerd with no dependents, and I'm well aware that such an expenditure would not be as painless for, say, Indrajaya and Kinandjar, who have two children to look after and house and school payments to juggle. In the face of more pressing financial concerns, anyone might reasonably decide that throwing money at windmills is, well, quixotic.

And given that neither the Green Power Switch nor the Generation Partners program is likely to have a dramatic effect on sales of solar panels in the next seven years (TVA hopes to get a grand total of "up to" 15 houses into Generation Partners in the next year), they are also not likely to do much to advance Christian's bold vision of releasing the Volkswagen of net-zero-energy homes by 2010.

"The message is simple," said Smith. "TVA is doing a good job of getting the ball rolling, but to get these programs to take off in a big way you need federal-level efforts -- in particular a Renewable Portfolio Standard that requires a certain percentage of the whole generation mix in this country to come from renewable energy."

TVA's Harris herself suggested that the prospect of an RPS was part of what was propelling the shift toward renewables among utilities nationwide. "Utilities are beginning to recognize [the desire for renewable energy as] a growing trend among both consumers and policy makers. ... The Renewable Portfolio idea has been hanging around Washington for so long, and typically lawmakers get worn down over the years and say, 'Okay, we'll put something in there on that.' And when that happens it's to your advantage, from a cost standpoint, to have already started such a program. Smart businesses want to be ahead of the curve."

Extending his Volkswagen metaphor, Christian argues that, in the world of building development, the zero-energy solar home is the equivalent of the Freedom Car (the Bush administration's moniker for the fuel-cell car of the future). After all, buildings produce a large percentage of carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S., so decreasing those emissions would make a big difference. Said Christian,

"The attitude in Washington should be: Let's everybody put the best brains on it, let's put it up there with the man on the moon, with the Freedom Car. Let's make it the grand challenge."

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"That's all folks!" Your letters to the editor, with comments, good and bad, will be most welcome.