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Sept. 11 Workers Agree to Settle Health Lawsuits

By **MIREYA NAVARRO**

After a wrenching seven-year battle, more than 10,000 workers who sued New York City over health damages they claimed after the 9/11 recovery efforts have approved a [settlement](#), clearing the way for payouts totaling at least \$625 million, lawyers said Friday.

Their responses, delivered to a federal judge in Manhattan, ended months of wrangling over whether the city and its contractors were shortchanging the workers for the respiratory and other illnesses they developed after toiling in the smoldering ruins of the World Trade Center.

The judge, [Alvin K. Hellerstein](#) of United States District Court, threw out a smaller settlement in March, arguing that the plaintiffs deserved more and lawyers were getting too big a cut.

A 95 percent approval rate was required for the latest accord to take effect. The plaintiffs barely cleared the threshold by the Tuesday night deadline they were given: 95.1 percent of the 10,563 workers accepted the settlement's terms, according to documents filed on Friday.

In their lawsuits, the firefighters, police officers and other workers argued that the city had failed to provide adequate protective equipment and supervision as they retrieved victims' remains at ground zero and cleared smoky debris.

"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," Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) said in a statement. "We will continue our commitment to treatment and monitoring of those who were present at ground zero."

Still, many plaintiffs were pained by the vigorous legal defense mounted by the city as the lawsuits began flowing in 2003.