

## **Immigrant Laborers Say They Knew of Job Risks**

The New York Times

November 24, 1999, Wednesday, Late Edition - Final

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**Distribution:** Metropolitan Desk

**Section:** Section B; ; Section B; Page 5; Column 2; Metropolitan Desk ; Column 2;

**Length:** 823 words

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### **Body**

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Lauriano Avilez **said** that he and other **immigrant** workers who poured concrete and put up the cinder block walls at a construction site that collapsed yesterday in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, **knew** toiling inside the structure had its **risks**.

"Yes, we **knew** it wasn't stable," **said** Mr. Avilez, who was shaken but uninjured when the third floor of the building fell in yesterday morning, killing one of his colleagues and injuring several others. "The building was not in good condition. It was not well-constructed."

But Mr. Avilez, who **said** he came to New York from the Mexican state of Guerrero five years ago, **said** that he and the other workers never gave much thought to the potential dangers. "To tell the truth," he **said** in a quiet voice, "I wasn't worried about that."

After yesterday's collapse, however, the construction workers and advocates for **immigrants** were raising questions about unsafe conditions at construction sites, especially in Williamsburg, which is undergoing a building boom to accommodate a growth spurt, driven in large part by Hasidic Jews, who typically have large families.

**Immigrant** advocates **said** a large number of workers at the many construction sites in the neighborhood are in the country illegally, and tend to take low-paying and sometimes risky **jobs** as they embark on new lives in New York. Many of them, the advocates **say**, are Mexicans, who demographers **say** are one of the fastest-growing **immigrant** groups in the city and now number over 300,000.

"Most of the newly arrived Mexicans don't have immigration papers, so they take any **job** they can get, construction among them," **said** Anne Pilsbury, director of Central American Legal Assistance, an organization in Williamsburg that provides legal aid to **immigrants**. "But obviously they're not working for the major construction companies, they're working for the more irregular crews. These **jobs** pay below the market going rate, and that's why they ended up with undocumented people who are not unionized, and are not going to complain about dangerous practices."

The authorities were investigating yesterday whether there were code violations at the accident site, at 50 Middleton Avenue, and whether the owner of the building and the construction contractor had violated the law by failing to pay the prevailing wage for construction projects and by using undocumented workers.

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The Rev. Brian Karvelis, pastor of Transfiguration Roman Catholic Church on Marcy Avenue in Williamsburg, **said** he often hears about local workers who have lost fingers or suffered other injuries in work-related accidents. "People who come here are desperate," he **said**. "They come from extreme poverty. They come here, and they have no money, no papers, and if they stop working they're on the street. So it's terror that forces them to take any **job**."

Hasidic leaders and landlords have been busy constructing apartment blocks, bland brick structures that are going up on several blocks in the heart of Williamsburg. "There's not enough room for Jewish families, so there's been an expansion and more buildings going up on the other side of Bedford Avenue," **said** Abie Kon, who has lived in the community 30 years.

**Immigrant** day **laborers** in Williamsburg often get hired after waiting in the morning for employers on the corner of Division Street and Bedford Avenue, several neighborhood workers **said**. If hired, they **said**, they will often stick with the project until it is completed.

Several Mexican **immigrants** **said** they had worked at construction sites that, in retrospect, were unsafe, either because the crew was too small or because the operation lacked necessities like scaffolding. But the workers **said** they were content to have a **job** they could go to for weeks and even months at a time, paying up to \$10 an hour.

"Yes, in truth it's dangerous," **said** Augustin Rosales Martinez, 35, who comes from rural Puebla, in southern Mexico. "When you're up at the top, putting up beams and walls, there's not much to protect you."

Juan Jose Rivera, 27, a Mexican **immigrant** who works for a company that sells building materials in Williamsburg, **said** many of his countrymen look for **jobs** in construction because they worked as carpenters in their homeland. Accustomed to difficult conditions and low wages, the workers see the **job** situation in New York as an improvement over what they had in Mexico, Mr. Rivera **said**.

"Unfortunately, there are paisanos who get used to low pay and bad conditions and don't complain," he **said**. "It might be hard work. It might be dangerous, but they do it."

Alfonso Castillo, a Honduran **immigrant** who worked for the contractor providing the concrete to the building on Middleton Avenue, **said** workers from Mexico and Central America are in high demand because they have a reputation for working hard under difficult conditions.

"They look for us because we'll do this work," Mr. Castillo **said**. "No one else is going to do this."

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## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (89%); ILLEGAL **IMMIGRANTS** (89%); FOREIGN LABOR (89%); RELIGION (89%); LEGAL AID (85%); WAGES & SALARIES (78%); WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS (78%); WAGE VIOLATIONS (78%); CRAFT & TRADE WORKERS (78%); CONSTRUCTION SECTOR PERFORMANCE (78%); LABOR UNIONS (73%); PREVAILING WAGES (73%); JEWS & JUDAISM (71%); CHRISTIANS & CHRISTIANITY (71%); WOUNDS & INJURIES (71%); INVESTIGATIONS (65%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (64%); CATHOLICS & CATHOLICISM (50%); POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS (50%)

**Company:** XIAMEN ANNE CORP LTD (53%); XIAMEN ANNE CORP LTD (53%); XIAMEN ANNE CORP LTD (53%); XIAMEN ANNE CORP LTD (53%)

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**Ticker:** 002235 (SZSE) (53%)

**Industry:** CONSTRUCTION (90%); LEGAL AID (85%); NEW CONSTRUCTION (78%); CONSTRUCTION SECTOR PERFORMANCE (78%)

**Geographic:** NEW YORK, NY, USA (79%); NEW YORK, USA (90%); MEXICO (93%); CENTRAL AMERICA (57%)

**Load-Date:** November 24, 1999

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