

Health hazards persist in waste-transfer neighborhoods

Nearly all the city's trash is processed in three neighborhoods in Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx, and a bill to change that has met stiff opposition.



AMANDA MIKELBERG
@MetroNewYork
amanda.mikelberg@metro.us

Even on the sunniest day, a dark cloud lingers. It is the veil of exhaust and stench of garbage that hovers over northern Bushwick.

Osiris Arias and his wife, Marina, have endured it since they moved to the Brooklyn neighborhood in 1995, and it has only gotten worse, they say. The source of their problem stands a few hundred feet from their home: a waste-transfer station.

Operated by Five Star Carting, the transfer station is one of 15 privately owned facilities in the area. Nearly half of New York City's daily mountain of trash is trucked in, sorted and trucked out from those facilities. Calls to Five Star Carting were not returned.

"If that thing wasn't here it would be perfect," said Arias, an immigrant from the Dominican Re-



High school senior Andy Gonzelez's neighborhood is full of trucks and right near a waste-transfer station. BESS ADLER

public. The family of five does not have the means to move, so they have remained in their first-floor apartment on the corner of Thames Street and Knickerbocker Avenue.

Their youngest son, 9-year-old Oziel, suffers from debilitating asthma attacks, which the couple attributes in large part to the effects of the transfer station.

Three neighborhoods

in three boroughs take in nearly 80 percent of the city's trash, about 40,000 tons a day. They are located in the South Bronx, Jamaica, Queens, and North Brooklyn.

There are no waste-transfer stations in Manhattan, despite the fact that the borough produces 40 percent of the city's garbage. Attempts to place one on the Upper East Side was met with

stiff opposition from the community, yet resulted in a compromise in 2015 for a marine transfer station that is slated to open in 2020.

Staten Island doesn't have a waste-transfer facility, but residents there had to live for decades with the effects of the Fresh Kills Landfill before it closed in 2001.

A recent City Council bill addresses the issue and

seeks to help the affected neighborhoods. But that, too, has encountered opposition. In the Hunts Point section of the Bronx, the effects of waste transfer stations in the neighborhood are compounded by the pollution from the trucks that cart the garbage in and out.

Andy Gonzelez, 17,



lives in that area with his family, just off of the Bruckner Expressway. He holds his breath outside his apartment, he says, because the block he lives on is like a gateway to the waste-transfer stations.

Melissa Iachan, an attorney for New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, said the council's bill is meant to limit the continued growth of the companies controlling the industry in places like Hunts Point and Bushwick.

Iachan said the situation started to get worse 15 years ago, after the Staten Island landfill was finally capped.

En-terprising people saw money and control by opening transfer stations and charging the city to accept the garbage," she said. "These business people were looking to build their facilities in neighborhoods where residents weren't organized enough, were scared to speak up, and didn't have the resources to fight against them."

For more information about the hazards of waste-transfer facilities, visit metro.us

Searching for solutions to waste-transfer problems

The New York City Council has been trying to tackle the waste-transfer problem.

A bill introduced in 2014 would have capped the maximum amount of garbage each company could truck into each community district.

The legislation sought an 18 percent reduction in the maximum amount of waste the facilities were allowed to process. Following forceful resistance, the bill was revised in 2016. The new version calls for a 50 percent reduction in maximum capacity, but with exemptions if the



Zeval Transfer LLC is one of the waste-transfer stations in Hunts Point, Bronx. They deal with recycled materials. BESS ADLER

companies do more recycling and use rail and marine transfer instead of trucks.

Called Intro 495, the

bill's primary sponsors are council members Stephen Levin and Antonio Reynoso, who both represent the

areas of Brooklyn that feel the impact from the waste stations.

Levin said he understands the issue is

a controversial one, but he maintains a few neighborhoods shouldn't have to bear most of the burden — and potential health risks — for most of the city.

"It's been unregulated for too long. It's been allowed to persist in this inequitable framework for decades," Levin said. Eighteen council members remain supportive of the new bill, fewer than the original one.

Private garbage and carting companies oppose Intro 495, as do elected officials who rely on those facilities for economic viability

in their districts. Trash capacity restrictions will lead to job loss, they contend, and diverting garbage to new locations will increase costs.

Mayor Bill de Blasio has not weighed in on the measure. The mayor's office referred to a statement provided by the Sanitation Department, which said it is "committed to reducing the burden of waste management infrastructure on historically overburdened communities. We look forward to working with the Council on ways to achieve this goal."

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