



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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**REMARKS OF DOI COMMISSIONER JOCELYN E. STRAUBER
AT PRESS CONFERENCE WITH THE BRONX DISTRICT ATTORNEY AND CITY DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS**

Good afternoon.

The charges we announce today are the result of law enforcement collaboration and so I want to start by thanking District Attorney Darcel Clark and her team, Assistant District Attorneys James Goward and Magnolia Perez Rosario, for bringing this important prosecution against these four construction professionals. I also want to thank Acting Buildings Commissioner Kazimir Vilenchik for his agency's help in our investigation. And from DOI, I want to thank Senior Inspector General Greg Cho, Assistant Inspector General Eliza Kopelman, Chief Investigator James McElligott, First Deputy IG Kim Ryan-Flores and Deputy IG Ed Zinser for their work on the case.

The construction industry plays a critical role in our City and State's economy, and protecting the men and women who perform this important and often dangerous work must be the priority for contractors licensed to operate in the five boroughs. As charged, the defendants ignored essential safety requirements and their conduct led to the death of one worker and injuries to five others.

On August 27, 2019, the third-floor metal flooring at a four-story residential construction project collapsed under the weight of a stack of concrete blocks. One worker — Segundo Manuel Huerta Mayancela, who was 46-years old — was killed in the collapse and five others were injured. A subsequent investigation revealed that the steel joists, the vertical posts that hold the metal flooring from below, were not properly secured to the structure. They fell forward and the third-story floor collapsed, causing the flooring, workers and hundreds of pounds of material to fall to the floor below.

To perform construction on this type of residential project in the City of New York, you need two things: A permit issued by DOB and a licensed construction superintendent who is responsible for overall safety at the site. This investigation determined, as charged, that a permit was obtained based on false representations and that the construction superintendent and the other defendants did not follow the City's construction rules.

That construction superintendent, Abazi Okoro, was required to assign a "competent person" to remain on-site when Okoro was not present to ensure safety standards were being met. That person was required to be there each day, all day when Okoro was not present. The charges here are based in part, as alleged, on the defendants' failure to follow that rule.

In addition, DOI found that Okoro was also working full time for the City Department of Design and Construction at the time of the collapse, but did not disclose his second job as a construction superintendent to DDC, as required by City rules and agency procedures. DOI referred that aspect of this matter to DDC and subsequently Okoro left City service.

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In addition, during this investigation, Okoro allowed his construction superintendent license to lapse and therefore is currently not authorized by DOB to work in that capacity.

The illegal conduct charged in this indictment includes false statements to obtain the requisite permits and a failure to ensure site safety, which, among other things, ultimately contributed to the death and injuries at issue.

The charged conduct reflects a total disregard for the Building Code's licensing and permitting requirements, and other DOB rules that are crucial to the safety of construction sites, construction workers, and members of the public. Violations of these rules can have deadly consequences, as they did here. This prosecution cannot make the victims and their families whole, but my hope is that it brings some measure of justice and comfort to them and sends a strong message to those who would engage in dangerous conduct for profit.

An indictment is an accusation. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country and New York City's corruption watchdog. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City. DOI's strategy attacks corruption comprehensively through systemic investigations that lead to high-impact arrests, preventive internal controls and operational reforms that improve the way the City runs.

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