



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

MARK G. PETERS
COMMISSIONER

80 MAIDEN LANE
NEW YORK, NY 10038
212-825-5900

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**CONTACT: DIANE STRUZZI
NICOLE TURSO
(212) 825-5931**

**14 CHARGED IN SEPARATE CONSTRUCTION SCHEMES
JOINT INVESTIGATION BY DOI AND BROOKLYN DISTRICT ATTORNEY**

Mark G. Peters, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), in partnership with Acting Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez, announced today charges against 14 individuals, including property managers and developers, a private asbestos inspector, and two inspectors with the New York City Department of Buildings ("DOB") in connection with three separate schemes involving construction fraud, including fraudulent asbestos inspections by a private, certified asbestos investigator; bribe receiving by two DOB inspectors in exchange for improperly passing properties; and the submission of fabricated permits by a Licensed Master Plumber ("LMP") to cover illegal plumbing work, according to the charges. One of the arrests is pending.

Commissioner Mark G. Peters said, "These arrests again demonstrate the enduring link between integrity and safety that DOI has traced over its many construction-related investigations. Taking a bribe and looking the other way on inspections, falsifying inspection reports, and trading a license for cash, all compromise the integrity of construction projects and endanger workers and residents. DOI in its partnership with the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office has rooted out these varying forms of construction-related fraud and will continue to work to keep the City's construction sites safe."

Acting Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said, "These investigations are a testament to our continuing commitment to keep people safe as developers too often are willing to take shortcuts at the risk of public safety to rapidly get their properties to market. These cases are all the more disturbing because City employees who are charged with making sure buildings are up to code were willing to overlook violations in exchange for cash and gifts. I look forward to continuing to work with DOI and will not let anybody sell the safety of the people of Brooklyn for their own profit."

Each of the criminal cases announced today stemmed from DOI's monitoring of court-ordered wiretaps related to another investigation with the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office earlier this year. In that investigation more than three dozen individuals, including seven National Grid employees, were charged as part of a scheme to operate a shadow utility company and conduct illegal construction work. A copy of that press release and DOI's report can be found at the following link: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/doi/newsroom/public-reports.page>

The three schemes charged are described in detail below:

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Charged Fraudulent Asbestos Inspections

According to the indictment and DOI's investigation, ALEXANDER KOGAN, 60, of Brooklyn, N.Y., a Certified Asbestos Investigator ("CAI") licensed with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection ("DEP") charged between \$1,000 to \$3,500 to provide a fraudulent asbestos report, known as an ACP-5, to property managers and developers, stating that a property had no asbestos. These investigations must be completed prior to a property owner or contractor receiving final approval for building permits. During the course of the investigation, it was revealed that KOGAN failed to go to a location entirely to conduct an investigation, briefly went to locations for photos, claimed to have inspected buildings that had already been demolished, or took samples of building areas where KOGAN knew asbestos would not be present. Additionally, during a search warrant executed at KOGAN's office, DOI investigators found numerous pre-packaged samples of "dry wall," which the investigation found were sent to laboratories for asbestos testing, instead of actual samples from buildings where KOGAN was conducting investigations.

Another defendant, YOEL ROTH, 32, of Brooklyn, N.Y., worked to refer property owners and contractors to KOGAN, through ROTH'S demolition company, Presco. According to the charges, ROTH was taking a portion of the proceeds from the illegal asbestos scheme by inflating KOGAN's investigation costs to property owners.

Property managers and developers, LAWRENCE BERLIANSHIK, 27, of Brooklyn, N.Y.; and YEHUDA UNGER, 36, of Brooklyn, NY were also charged in the scheme by an indictment obtained by the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office. The arrest of a third property manager charged in this scheme is pending.

Each defendant was charged with Forgery in the Second Degree and Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, both class D felonies; Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, a class E felony; and Falsifying Business Records in the Second Degree, a class A misdemeanor.

Upon conviction, a class D felony is punishable by up to seven years in prison, a class E felony is punishable by up to four years in prison, and a class A misdemeanor is punishable by up to one year's incarceration.

The defendants were arrested and arraigned Tuesday, October 24, 2017, are expected back in court on December 13th.

Addresses associated with this scheme are:

- 156 Erasmus Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 600 Park Place, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 960 Alabama Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 48 Jefferson Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 1430 51st Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 2022 Nostrand Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 1479 Greene Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.

DEP re-inspected each of the properties as a result of this investigation, and where it confirmed the presence of asbestos, ordered abatement.

Charged Bribe Receiving by DOB Inspectors

According to the criminal complaints, DOB Construction Inspector HIRAM BEZA, 55, of Queens, N.Y., issued favorable construction inspections to multiple property owners and managers in exchange for cash payoffs and various home renovations, including the construction of a brand new kitchen in his home. The investigation also exposed misconduct by another DOB Construction Inspector, DEAN MULZAC. MULZAC, 53, of Brooklyn, N.Y., took free jewelry from a property manager who also owned a jewelry store in return for passing the property manager's inspection.

BEZA and MULZAC were both charged with Bribe Receiving in the Third Degree, a class D felony,

and Official Misconduct, a class A misdemeanor. BEZA was also charged with Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, a class E felony.

BEZA has been employed by DOB since April 2005, and receives an annual base salary of \$68,672; MULZAC has been employed by DOB since April 2005, and receives an annual base salary of \$71,515. Each was suspended upon arrest.

The following property managers and developers were charged in connection with this scheme: RUBEN BADALOV, 36, of Queens, N.Y.; YOEL BLUM, 35, of Spring Valley, N.Y.; ZEV CHASKELSON, 44, of Brooklyn, N.Y.; YAKHIEL FIRGIYEV, 31, of Queens, N.Y.; MATAN HACOEN, 37, of Bellerose, N.Y.; and AMRITPAL SANDHU, 49, of Cedarhurst, N.Y.

BADALOV, BLUM, CHASKELSON, HACOEN and SANDHU were each charged with Bribery in the Third Degree, a class D felony.

CHASKELSON, FIRGIYEV and HACOEN were also charged with Giving Unlawful Gratuities, a class A misdemeanor.

FIRGIYEV was additionally charged with Rewarding Official Misconduct in the Second Degree, a class E felony.

Upon conviction, a class D felony is punishable by up to seven years in prison, a class E felony is punishable by up to four years in prison, and a class A misdemeanor is punishable by up to one year's incarceration.

All of these arrests took place today.

Addresses associated with this scheme are:

- 841 Hancock Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 55 Wythe Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 1229 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 68-48 147th Street, Flushing, N.Y.
- 1059 Manhattan Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 828 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 752 Jefferson Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 814 Quincy Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 376A Monroe Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.

DOB re-inspected each of the properties as a result of this investigation, and issued violations where appropriate.

Charged Illegal Plumbing Work

According to the criminal complaint and DOI's investigation, Licensed Master Plumber ("LMP"), HENRY SAMUELS, 58, of Rosedale, N.Y., filed fraudulent permits with the City that allowed unlicensed individuals to work on the properties. In return, SAMUELS received a fee of between \$1,500 and \$2,500 per permit. LMPs are mandated by the City's construction code to perform the work or directly supervise the work listed on the permit. In this case, SAMUELS never went to the construction sites to inspect the work. Dozens of properties were involved in this scheme. DOB inspected each of these properties and issued stop work orders and violations where appropriate.

SAMUELS was arrested and charged today with Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, a class E felony, punishable by up to four years in prison.

DOI Commissioner Peters thanked Acting Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez, DEP Commissioner Vincent Sapienza, DOB Commissioner Rick D. Chandler, and their staffs, for their cooperation and assistance in this investigation.

The investigation was conducted by DOI's Offices of the Inspector General for construction-related crimes, specifically Investigator Christina Clyburn, Investigator Alicia Ramoutar, Investigator Kyle Waters, Chief Investigator James McElligott, Assistant Inspector General Michael Antolini, and Deputy Inspector General Ed Zinser, under the supervision of Inspector General Gregory Cho, Associate Commissioner James Flaherty, Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Investigations Michael Carroll and First Deputy Commissioner Lesley Brovner, with assistance from NYPD Detectives assigned to DOI.

The case is being prosecuted by the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, specifically Assistant District Attorney Sara Walshe, Assistant District Attorney Adam Libove, Assistant District Attorney Katherine Zdrojeski, and Assistant District Attorney Renee Hassel, a DOI attorney who has been assigned to the District Attorney's Public Integrity Bureau, under the supervision of Bureau Chief of Public Integrity Michel Spanakos, Deputy Chief of Investigations Patricia McNeill, and Senior Executive for Crimes Strategies and Investigations Mark Feldman.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. 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.

**DOI's press releases can also be found at twitter.com/doinews
Bribery and Corruption are a Trap. Don't Get Caught Up. Report It at 212-3-NYC-DOI.**