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### Brooklyn Trash Problems

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**Walk through the streets of New York and at some point you'll inevitably pass by a wafting smell of garbage, but residents of North Brooklyn are handling more than their share of the smelly load and they're tired of getting dumped on.**

**A newly formed coalition of neighbors and environmental activists has begun a turf war against Brooklyn Transfer LLC, a waste transfer station located on Thames Street in East Williamsburg, which handles private commercial waste through Five Star Carting.**

**"Since I moved to the area, the odor coming from the waste transfer station is unbearable, especially in the warmer months" said Jen of the newly created Clean Up North Brooklyn. "They leave their doors open and you can't open your windows without the smell of garbage wafting into your home."**

**Members of Clean Up North Brooklyn produced an eight-minute [video](#) with testimony from residents, local businesses and activists detailing the problems ranging from the smell, truck traffic, and environmental pollutants they say is being caused by Brooklyn Transfer.**

**Luis Velasquez, a neighborhood resident and co-creator of Clean Up North Brooklyn, has been dealing with the issue for the past 15 years. "When I was younger I used to hold my breath and skip down the block to get home faster," Velasquez said. "As a kid I didn't take into consideration how this was affecting me."**

**But while Brooklyn Transfer has been called "the worst of the worst" by local politicians, environmental activists say the problem affecting the Greenpoint, Williamsburg and Bushwick communities of North Brooklyn is much larger than a single waste transfer station. "For decades, low-income communities and communities of color have handled a disproportionate burden of NYC's commercial waste." said Eddie Bautista, Executive Director of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance.**

**Brooklyn has been dealing with the city's trash for years with activists successfully joining forces to halt a proposed incinerator at the Brooklyn**

**Navy Yard in the early 90's. But today, nearly 80 percent of the city's waste transfer stations are located in overburdened, communities in Brooklyn, Queens and The Bronx-- with North Brooklyn itself housing nearly 40 percent of the facilities. "You can just imagine the pollution from trucks," Velasquez said. "People who don't live in this community, don't know what we go through every day."**

**In late November, Antonio Reynoso, Councilmember of Brooklyn District 34, spoke at a community meeting organized by Clean Up North Brooklyn and called the problem "a result of environmental injustice and racial injustice," admitting that "bad planning" was a part of the issue when the area was rezoned for residential use.**

**Annually, New York City generates 14 million tons of waste and recyclables and every day nearly 11,000 tons of trash produced by the five boroughs makes its way to one of the 20 waste transfer stations located in Brooklyn, according to reports from the NYC Department of Sanitation.**

**Since the closing of the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island in the 90's, waste transfer stations have become a necessary part of the city's sanitation infrastructure, serving as a transportation hub for garbage. Trash is picked up curbside, then trucked to a transfer station where it's loaded onto larger vehicles and sent via truck or rail to its final destination in the landfills of upstate New York and out-of-state facilities.**

**In 2014, a bill was introduced to the City Council with sponsorships from Councilmember Reynoso, and Stephen T. Levin, Councilmember of Brooklyn District 33, along with councilmembers from heavily trash-burdened districts in The Bronx and Queens.**

**Intro 495 calls for a mandated 18 percent reduction of trash sent to transfer stations in overburdened community districts , and a 5 percent limit on the amount of waste any one community would have to bear. The cuts would be at the discretion of the sanitation commissioner based on a number of criteria including, proximity to schools and playgrounds, the amount of truck traffic travelling through neighborhoods, and transfer stations with numerous violations.**

**The bill, however, failed to make it past the sanitation commission as critics and union protestors, claim it would lead to a loss in union jobs and make it difficult to meet the city's sanitation needs. In a February 2014 City Council hearing, NYC Department of Sanitation Commissioner Kathryn Garcia also testified that the neighborhood waste processing limits could create a dangerous problem for the city during extreme weather and other emergency situations.**

**However, according to Lacey Tauber of Councilmember Reynoso's office, the terms of the bill are still being negotiated and it currently contains an emergency waiver that can override certain mandates should a major weather event take place. As for jobs-- Tauber admits that "it's possible that some jobs can be lost in this process, but it's likely that they're not quality jobs," since many private sanitation jobs are dangerous, non-union and low-paid.**

**The bill currently has the backing of 27 City Councilmembers and efforts are being made to garner the support of City Council speaker Melissa Mark-Vivarito. During the November meeting, community members of North Brooklyn signed a petition urging Ms. Mark-Vivarito to "take every possible step to pass this bill," as residents have "suffered for far too long under a system in which only a few neighborhoods handle the vast majority of the entire city's garbage."**

**Another problem plaguing the trash industry is the current unregulated system of commercial waste handling. According to a 2015 [study](#) conducted by Transform Don't Trash NYC, private trucking companies transport the 5.5 million tons of commercial waste produced by NYC businesses (the NYCDOS handles residential waste). By law, businesses must pay and arrange for private haulers to pick up their garbage, but it's currently a free-for-all as many commercial waste companies compete for business in the same area.**

**The TDTNYC study found as many as 22 different private haulers operating on a single commercial strip leading to a large amount of trucks damaging roads, polluting the air with diesel fumes, and leaving the toxic run-off of garbage on neighborhood streets-- and residents are suffering for it. In a [report](#) released by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, The Greenpoint-Williamsburg areas of North**

**Brooklyn ranked the eighth worst air quality out of the city's 59 community districts.**

**The NYCDOS currently uses environmentally friendly, ultra-low-sulfur diesel trucks, but the majority of private carters are still using diesel burning trucks which leave a trail of diesel fumes-- a known asthma trigger and carcinogen. A SUNY Downstate Medical Center report found that the Williamsburg and Bushwick communities "have far higher rates of emergency room visits and hospitalizations for asthma than the rest of the borough and New York City."**

**Members of TDTNYC want the city to adopt a zoned collection system, where reputable businesses are required to meet environmental and labor standards in order to compete for commercial business. The zones would reduce the amount of truck traffic and minimize air pollutants as cleaner, environmentally friendly trucks would replace the current diesel burners.**

**In April 2015, Mayor Bill de Blasio released "OneNYC" sustainability plan that aims to reform the city's commercial waste and recycling programs in order to achieve a goal of "Zero Waste" to landfills by 2030. The NYC Department of Sanitation is currently conducting a study on the commercial waste industry which should be completed by summer 2017. "The DeBlasio administration set a pretty ambitious goal and if they're going get there by 2030, they're going to have to make some really substantial changes," Tauber said.**

**As for Brooklyn Transfer LLC-- since the November meeting, Councilmember Reynoso reports that the NYC DOS has made a 50 percent reduction in the amount of waste they send to Brooklyn Transfer and the company has since received two \$10,000 violations.**

**A spokesman for Five Star Carting, however, disputed allegations that the company wasn't following proper rules and guidelines for safety and cleanliness. "We operate a clean, well maintained environment with an excellent performance evaluation, as stated by the Mayor's office of contract services," said Ara Chekmayan. "Five Star would love to come in and participate in community events and affairs-- we want to show our commitment to continue being good neighbors."**

**Jen of Clean Up North Brooklyn still isn't convinced of Five Star's commitment to the community. "They make millions of dollars a year and they've done little to invest back into their community," Jen said. "I love my apartment, it's my home. Why should a whole community of residents and businesses suffer because one company isn't taking care of what they should."**