

At Long Last, Trial Dates Are Set in Lawsuits by Sick World Trade Center Rescue and Recovery Workers

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Editorial

More than seven years after the World Trade Center attack, a judge has at last set the first trial date for suits filed by sick rescue and recovery workers. Check your calendar. Are you free in May 2010?

At that point, almost nine long, painful, wasteful, unnecessary years will have passed since 9/11 - and only a handful of the thousands of suits will be marked for jury selection.

Will this legal torture never end? Will the people who served their country and paid with their health never catch a break?

The fault does not rest with the court. Federal Judge Alvin Hellerstein is driving hard to force this mass litigation through the funnel of his docket. Last week, he spelled out how from among 9,000 cases, involving 387 diseases and more than 200 defendants, a few will be selected for trial.

It's both a magnificent exercise in case management and a powerful mechanism for forcing settlements. And it proves the point once more: Congress and President Obama must reopen the Sept. 11 Victim Compensation Fund so the claims of all the injured can be paid speedily and at far smaller legal cost.