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Hundreds protest vs. bus depot

By YOAV GONEN
DAILY NEWS WRITER

More than 200 people held a rally yesterday to protest the opening of the latest city bus depot in asthma-choked upper Manhattan.

The new Metropolitan Transportation Authority bus depot on E. 99th St. long has been a target of clean-air activists, who fear it will worsen asthma rates in East Harlem, which already has some of the highest rates of the respiratory disorder in the city.

A day before the so-called bus barn's opening, members of the East Harlem Asthma Working Group were joined by Sens. Chuck Schumer and Hillary Clinton in a last-minute march to draw attention to the area's asthma epidemic.

"I have grandchildren and great-grandchildren with asthma," said Irma Harden, 71, of East Harlem. "What's killing us is the bus depots."

The New York City Environmental Justice Alliance recently cited Harlem as one of the neighborhoods where lousy air quality puts children at risk of asthma.

Seven of the eight bus barns in Manhattan are north of 96th St., but the Transit Authority said it has few options for new facilities. Officials also insist new buses will not release as many toxins as those that burn diesel fuel.

More than 100 buses will use the depot, built on the site of an old bus depot.

"The entire borough should share the burden," Councilman Philip Reed (D-Manhattan) said.

Originally published on September 7, 2003

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