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## Buildings Department a disaster, \$4M study reveals

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Buildings Department inspectors are poorly trained, inspections are frequently slipshod and fines are routinely laughed off as "the cost of doing business."

Those are the findings of a \$4 million study released yesterday by the troubled city agency at the end of a five-year building boom that led to record numbers of construction deaths.

"Inspectors are currently not uniformly equipped to judge the acceptability of common unsafe conditions," the study concluded. "They rely primarily on their own varying level of training, experience and degree of tolerance on nonconforming issues."

The report faulted the department for having "no standard training procedure" for critical field inspections and said procedures are so lax it's often impossible to determine whether architects' plans conform to city code.

The study noted that "nonuniform enforcement is the most common industry criticism" of the Buildings Department. Violation fees "are considered a 'cost of doing business.'"

The findings come after 19 construction fatalities last year, including nine killed in two crane collapses that focused a spotlight on the Buildings Department's corrupt crane inspection unit.

In the last year, the top city crane inspector was indicted for taking bribes from a crane owner who served on the department's influential cranes and derricks advisory council; the inspector for one of the collapsed cranes was indicted for faking his report, and an inspector with links to both collapses was fired for "neglect of duty."

Consultants found problems in 68% of the tower cranes they observed, more than half related to

maintenance and repair. Disturbingly, the study determined there is "no current method to confirm that crane repairs restore [a damaged] crane to proper working condition."

The report also noted that 23% of the tower cranes in the city are more than 30 years old, a formula for potential disaster.

The high-priced study team, led by CTL Engineers and Construction Technology Consultants, made more than 600 visits to some 400 sites in the five boroughs.

It found glaring problems in three basic construction operations - cranes, excavation and concrete - and made 66 recommendations for changes in procedures, some of which the Buildings Department has already implemented.

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