

# Probe Death of Brooklyn Housing Caretaker

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, March 16, 2015 5:15 pm

Investigators are seeking to determine what caused the death of a 31-year-old Housing Authority employee March 7 while she worked a maintenance shift in Brooklyn.

## Found in Project Basement

Police found Caretaker Toni Jackson, an employee since June 2013, in the basement of the Coney Island Houses. She lived in the Marlboro Houses in Gravesend, Brooklyn and had two children who are eight and 11 years old, according to the HA.

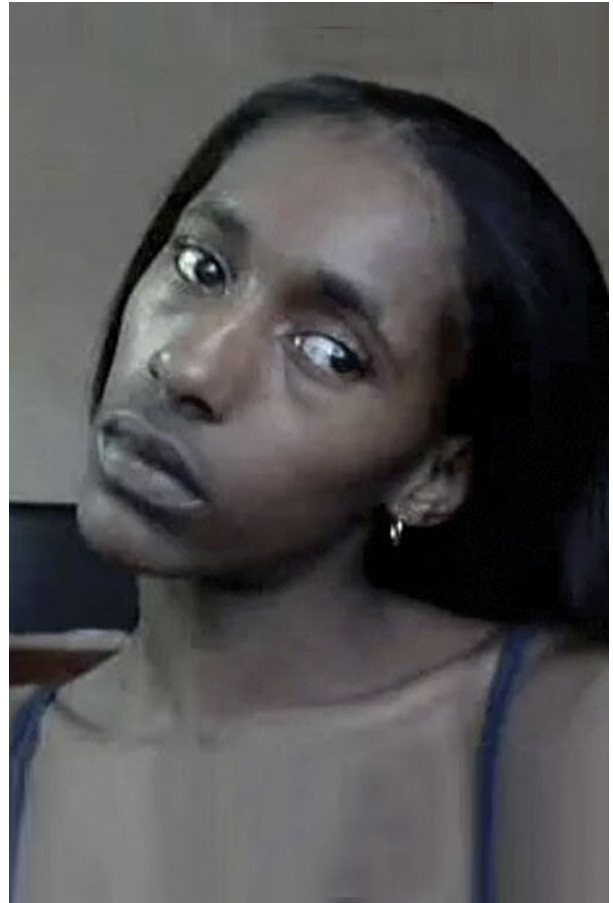
While media reports said the injury may have been from a plunge or from a fallen hoist, Diane Stein, Teamsters Local 237's health and safety coordinator, said she was awaiting tests before she could say how the fatal injury occurred.

There are three concurrent investigations; besides a joint investigation by the HA and Local 237—which represents more than 8,000 agency employees—the local is conducting one of its own, as is the state Department of Labor's Public Employee Safety and Health Bureau. Of particular interest is the maintenance of the equipment, and workplace procedures and training.

Though some buildings have a ramp that allows workers to carry trash from basement garbage rooms to a pick-up spot outside, the incident occurred in a building where operators use a hoist to lift trash from the basement to the ground-floor exit, she said. While it was too early to say what led to Ms. Jackson's death, Ms. Stein believed there were "multiple deficiencies in NYCHA's system."

## Physical Jobs Take Toll

The incident called attention to the high injury rate in the agency where, on any given day, a "couple of hundred" employees are not working because of work-related wounds or illnesses.



Jackson\_Toni

TONI JACKSON

“Many of the injuries can be caused by underfunding because there’s not enough staff to do all of this very heavy, physical labor,” she said.

Local 237 President Greg Floyd said that he has learned of workers who were shot or injured, but the incident was the first time in his recollection that an HA employee died on duty. He said the agency should put more resources into its health-and-safety program and ensure that HA employees are safe or can confidently report unsafe conditions.

“We’re encouraging NYCHA to make sure that every employee is properly trained in the equipment they have to use,” he said.

Last April, a Police Officer died of smoke inhalation and carbon-monoxide poisoning after responding to a burning mattress on the 13th floor in one of the buildings in the development.

The HA said last week that the investigation into Ms. Jackson’s death was continuing.

“We’d like to extend our condolences and prayers to her family and co-workers during this difficult time,” Chair Shola Olatoye said in a statement. “Our employees are the heart of NYCHA and this is a very sad day for all of us.”