



CYRUS R. VANCE, JR.
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

DISTRICT ATTORNEY – NEW YORK COUNTY

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**DA VANCE: LANDLORD PLEADS GUILTY FOR CREATING LIFE-THREATENING
CONDITIONS AT EAST HARLEM APARTMENT BUILDING**

Conviction Establishes Precedent for Successful Prosecution of Landlords for Reckless Endangerment

*Illegal and Dangerous Construction Left Family of Seven Without Heat and Hot Water, and Building at Risk of
Structural Collapse*



Interior of Apartment Adjacent to 5E at 21 East 115th Street on March 4, 2015.

Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., today announced the guilty plea of landlord and building owner EPHRAIM VASHOVSKY, 49, for endangering the lives of tenants of 21 East 115th Street by purposefully creating hazardous living conditions through ongoing illegal construction and renovation, intended to force them to vacate their rent-stabilized apartment by rendering it

unlivable. VASHOVSKY pleaded guilty in New York State Supreme Court to the top count against him, Reckless Endangerment in the First Degree, as well as Endangering the Welfare of a Child.

“This landmark conviction establishes for the first time that New York landlords can and will be held criminally responsible for forcing tenants to live in life-threatening conditions,” said District Attorney Vance. “Ephraim Vashovsky ordered a gut renovation and demolition that created an inhumane and unsafe living environment for a family with five young children – all while orchestrating a campaign of harassment to intimidate them into leaving the building. In this period of unprecedented development across New York City, I hope today’s guilty plea puts landlords on notice: we will not tolerate intimidation and corner-cutting measures that endanger New Yorkers, and we will not hesitate to bring criminal charges when necessary. Victims facing similar illegal tactics should be reassured that we are here to help, regardless of immigration status.”

DOI Commissioner Mark G. Peters said: “This defendant broke a cardinal rule of being a landlord when he harassed, intimidated, and compromised the safety of his tenants. DOI and the Manhattan District Attorney have shown through our joint investigations that safety is inextricably woven into the integrity of construction sites. Those who undercut that integrity and risk lives will be prosecuted.”

Public Advocate Letitia James said: “Today’s plea should serve as a dire warning to all unscrupulous landlords who put profits over people and place tenants in harm’s way: New York City will come after you. Ephraim Vashovsky, a repeat offender on my [Worst Landlords List](#), led a campaign of extreme tenant harassment, forcing a family with five young children to live in unthinkable and life-threatening conditions. I want to thank District Attorney Vance for ensuring this landlord was brought to justice and for protecting New Yorker’s right to a safe and decent home.”

As admitted in the defendant’s guilty plea and according to court documents, VASHOVSKY, as owner of 21 East 115th Street Ventures, LLC, forced a couple and their five young children, ranging in age from one-to-twelve years old, to vacate a rent-stabilized fifth-floor apartment at 21 East 115th Street by purposefully creating hazardous living conditions through ongoing illegal construction and renovation. Shortly after VASHOVSKY acquired the building in May 2014, the defendant and his associates began a campaign to drive the family out of its apartment in order to convert the building to luxury apartments.

Throughout, and during ongoing eviction proceedings and litigation in New York City Housing Court, VASHOVSKY moved to begin construction while the family still inhabited the apartment. VASHOVSKY endangered the lives of his tenants – as well as the construction workers he employed – by performing ongoing construction and major demolitions in violation of DOB and HPD regulations. VASHOVSKY knowingly created gravely dangerous living conditions, including the risk of an entire building collapse, by removing structural and load-bearing elements. Other major demolition included the removal of critical fire retardant materials, fire escapes, and internal walls and floors – creating the risk of a fire ripping through the building or an inhabitant falling multiple stories. VASHOVSKY failed to address or only partially addressed critical violations, including the lack of electricity, heat, hot water, and running water.

The cases against VASHOVSKY’s co-defendants are open and pending.

Assistant District Attorney Andrew Warshawer handled the prosecution of this case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Christopher Ryan, Chief of the Violent Criminal Enterprises Unit, and Executive Assistant District Attorney John Irwin, Chief of the Trial Division. Assistant District Attorney Lynn Goodman, Chief of the Asset Forfeiture Unit, is handling the asset forfeiture case under the supervision of Executive District Attorney Michael Sachs, Chief of the Investigation Division. Investigative Analyst Brendan Fallon is assisting with the case.

District Attorney Vance thanked the New York City Department of Investigation, particularly Special Investigator Dan Taylor and Chief Investigator James McElligott, as well as the New York City Department of Buildings, including its Forensic Engineering Unit and Office of Internal Affairs and Discipline. District Attorney Vance also thanked the New York City Public Advocate's Office, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and the New York City Department of Housing and Community Renewal's Tenant Protection Unit.

Defendant Information

EPHRAIM VASHOVSKY, D.O.B. 12/29/1967
Brooklyn, NY

Convicted:

- Reckless Endangerment in the First Degree, a class D felony, one count
- Endangering the Welfare of a Child, a class A misdemeanor, one count

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