

# NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Prosecutor's Office and the State Schools Construction Corporation Target 50 Abandoned Irvington Homes for Demolition

**NEWARK** – Essex County Prosecutor Paula T. Dow and New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation CEO Scott Weiner today announced a public safety initiative that targets 50 abandoned buildings in Irvington for demolition.

Coined “Operation Red Cap,” the demolition initiative was developed by the Essex County Prosecutor’s Arson Task Force, the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation and the Irvington Fire Department, in response to numerous fires in and around several abandoned buildings in Irvington, including a fatal fire that destroyed three homes in November. A special task force, consisting of representatives from the New Jersey State Police-Irvington Initiative Unit, the Essex County Social Services Office, the Irvington Neighborhood Improvement Corporation, the Irvington Fire Department, the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation and the Essex County Prosecutor’s Arson Task Force was formed in mid-January.

“Several of these abandoned buildings have been dangerously occupied by destitute people, used as stash houses by drug dealers and drug users, and were an eyesore for the rest of the community,” said Prosecutor Dow. “Through a special partnership between state, county and local agencies, this initiative is designed to enhance public safety, reduce crime, and improve the quality of life for the citizens of Irvington.

“We take our responsibility seriously to do everything possible to address public-safety issues in neighborhoods where we purchased properties for future school projects,” said Weiner. “We are committed to this important initiative. This effort is also an example of how the SCC is improving its effectiveness in collaborating with others on problems in general.”

The buildings targeted for demolition are located on 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 21<sup>st</sup> Street, 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, Nelson Place and Standard Place.

On January 24, 2007, 30 abandoned buildings were searched and properly secured by the task force. During their investigations of the properties, officials found several propane heaters, propane tanks, gasoline cans, candles and handgun ammunition. All of the buildings were unoccupied during the early morning raids. Occupants found in these vacated buildings will be subjected to a records check and arrested on any outstanding warrants. In addition, representatives from Social Services stand at

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the ready to relocate any homeless person. Additional raids are scheduled to take place during the next several weeks.

On November 30, 2006, Irvington Fire Department responded to a fire at an abandoned home located at 76 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. The burning building, which was located on SCC property, and occupied by a homeless man, quickly spread to two adjacent buildings, which were also destroyed by fire. The homeless man perished in the fire.

The New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation is beginning to move forward with its plan for “on-call” demolition. The initiative will create a pool of bidders who will have the exclusive right to bid on certain demolition work through January 2009, allowing the process to move far more quickly. The SCC intends to move within 30 to 60 days after a small group of properties is bought and vacated.

In addition, the SCC last month, awarded a \$2.7 million contract, which calls for the demolition of 31 houses at the Irvington Middle School site. The SCC began acquiring property in the East Ward neighborhood two years ago, but the project was among those suspended in 2005 for lack of funds. Demolition at the site should begin next month.