

Statement - 6/24/02 NIST Open Meeting
Scope of Interviews - Key Points for Pending NIST Investigation of the World Trade
Center Disaster

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I would like to thank Dr. Jack Snell for making this meeting a reality, Mat Heyman for his sleepless nights coordinating all the logistics, and the 911 families and concerned citizens for their support by coming today.

I am pleased with the Proposed Plan put forth by NIST. It is broad and comprehensive. The Plan demonstrates a true concern for finding the truth about the collapse of the World Trade Center and the multitude of issues related to the disaster.

However, regarding the Scope of Interviews, I would like to recommend the following:

1) It is imperative that the interviews for the NIST investigation into the collapse of the World Trade Center, specifically Towers 1 & 2, be based on a broad range of one-on-one, in-person, in-depth dialogue with of a large sample of survivors, survivor families, families of the victims, fire fighters, rescue workers, Port Authority employees, building maintenance and anyone else that might be able to provide insight into what was occurring inside the towers before, during and after the time of the attacks on the morning of September 11th.

2) The information from this sampling cannot be compiled by respondents simply completing a questionnaire. The fact that over 9 months has elapsed and memory has perhaps become vague dictates the need for in-person (face-to-face) interviews. Dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee, done by a trained professional, could help to jog the memory by the sequencing of questions asked for each particular situation. The method and sequencing of questioning can only be determined by conversations with each interviewee.

3) The scope should include the use of extensive research that has already been completed by the New York Times, specifically their lengthy article dated May 26, 2002, and USA Today. Each of these publications has been collecting data since September 11th. Also critical is the upcoming FDNY McKinsey report, which will provide insight into the operations of the FDNY on September 11th. Important data can also be culled from the complete set of 911 tapes, land line and cell phone calls, messages left on answering machines and BlackBerry e-mail devices. Transcripts and actual recordings of these calls have also been made available to magazines and syndicated television programs.

Our purpose here today is to help get the much-awaited investigation underway. We, the Skyscraper Safety Campaign, the families of the victims, and the public have many questions that need to find answers. We have also, in our questioning, been able to determine some of the immediate steps that can be implemented in order to prevent future tragedies and sorrow.

My husband, Rich, worked for Aon Corporation on the 103rd floor of Tower 2. At the time of the second attack, he was waiting for one of the two working express elevators on the 78th floor sky lobby. He was injured and unable to continue out to safety alone. He was alive and waiting for rescue workers to reach him. This information I obtained from a survivor who was with him at the time.

On the morning of September 11th some victims, in their attempt to evacuate the towers, encountered obstructed or non-existing stairwells, some ... smoke and fire. Several found themselves locked in a

conference room that was apparently designed to be "safe". The doors lock automatically. THEY DID NOT KNOW! Some went up to the roof and found the doors locked. Apparently a security change. THEY DID NOT KNOW! And many jumped to their deaths.

In my opinion, based on this anecdotal evidence, I disagree with the conclusion in the BPAT Report that there were "rigorous emergency exiting training programs of building tenants." How could so many people have thought that they could go up to the roof to get out or descend stairways only to find dead-ends?

Hopefully the NIST investigation will uncover the facts and focus our attention on finding answers to prevent future tragedies of this magnitude. We are confident that the NIST investigation will get to the bottom of this in a professional and scientific manner.

The anecdotal vignettes tell us how utterly horrible it must have been inside those death trap towers. These stories do not yet tell us WHY! These stories do, however, allow us to make assumptions about corrective actions and procedures that can be implemented immediately to create as safe an environment as possible for all occupants of buildings in this city and across the country.

I would like to remind everyone that the individuals who died on September 11th, were people, not numbers. They were husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. We grieve their loss and hope that their legacy will lead to changes in skyscraper building regulations and requirements that will create safe working and living environments.

In the aftermath of September 11th, my daughter's company recently had its first fire drill. The building has 37 floors. Thirty more than the fire service can adequately reach with their aerial ladders. My daughter works on the 10th floor. That's 3 floors out of reach.

The fire drill consisted of gathering in the building's lobby area of each floor. The building's management proceeded to explain where the fire alarms were, which stairwell to use ... A or B. They were informed that there were 5 handicap chairs available for the entire building ... a bit reminiscent of the Titanic. They were told not to use the elevators in an emergency. They were told that they were responsible for themselves and others.

This drill is post September 11th! Where are the lessons learned?

At the World Trade Center, Morgan Stanley lost few employees. WHY? Because their head of security INSISTED on regularly scheduled full drills. He insisted that everyone participate in these exercises. He insisted that all employees learn what to do in an emergency until they could do it blind-folded.

We need to address this issue in the interviews. Survivors need to be asked about emergency procedures. What they felt. Was it adequate? Do we need to have more specific training of personnel put in charge of safely ushering occupants out of buildings? What kind of training would best serve the occupants? How often should re-training be done? How often should drills take place? Should we continue to only "gather in a lobby or central location"? Should full evacuation drills become mandatory?

It is imperative that OSHA be fully involved in this investigation as well. It is a federal agency that is intimately involved with building emergency and evacuation procedures. It is the government oversight agency that regulates and monitors worker safety. It is responsible for imposing fines and/or criminal charges when compliance is not met. OSHA has received volumes of letters detailing complaints about the events of September 11th. OSHA needs to enthusiastically join the NIST investigation to determine how their regulations can be better written and enforced to take into account extreme emergencies. The complaints that were received by OSHA post September 11th need to be submitted to NIST for their investigation. There can NEVER AGAIN be any entity that is waived from compliance with any safety and

security regulations. There MUST be total evacuation drills mandated by law. OSHA and all agencies need to think 'outside the box'. The safety and security of people MUST come before economic considerations in constructing and safe guarding buildings. We cannot put a price on the preservation of life.

The data ... obtained from people, from videotapes, and from phone calls ... is critical to the investigation. Please ... don't let this crucial information slip through our fingers. We implore you ... we do not want a repeat of what happened to the WTC steel evidence.

Some will argue that we do not need to make quick "knee jerk" changes to our building codes. A few will even argue that no code changes are needed at all!

What we need is the boot end of a knee jerk reaction to expeditiously kick out the despicable building code provisions that allow 10 story buildings to be treated the same as 100 story buildings!

We need to ensure that new high rise buildings are structures of quality, safety, and security ... not the same old bare minimum codes and structural requirements. And we need to have it on the fast track!

We hope that the NIST investigation will provide the answers to the multitude of unresolved issues that remain in the wake of the recent FEMA BPAT assessment.

We strongly believe that the NIST investigation will provide an irrefutable, solid foundation for making appropriate changes to building codes, design practices, and emergency procedures. This will be a true legacy for those who were lost on September 11th.

We support and endorse NIST's proposed investigation plan, and as Professor Corbett said earlier, this investigation should have commenced in September, it is almost July. As for me, instead of making plans for my 29th wedding anniversary on July 14th, I am here before you today to urge you to commence a true, thorough investigation into the death of Rich and the almost 3,000 other victims.

Let's get moving.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before NIST today.