

**Remarks by Dr. Jack Snell**  
Director, Building and Fire Research Laboratory, NIST  
**NIST World Trade Center Investigation Media Briefing**  
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[Remarks as prepared]

Good morning. My name is Jack Snell. I am Director of the Building and Fire Research Laboratory of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the organization conducting the World Trade Center investigation. It is my pleasure to open this briefing.

Our purpose today is to seek your help in gaining the understanding and participation of persons who were in the towers on September 11, or who were in communication with people who were in the towers, in two key parts of the investigation. They deal with gathering first person accounts of occupant behaviors, evacuation and emergency response. Our plans for these two projects will be discussed in detail later by lead investigator Dr. Shyam Sunder and members of our team. Dr. Sunder will also provide a very brief update on progress of the overall investigation. What I would like to do in just a few minutes is to highlight the importance of these planned interviews and to put today's meeting in a larger context. Now is the time for the people who live or work in New York City to participate in this important Federal investigation to improve the safety of buildings, occupants, and first responders.

As you may recall, the NIST WTC investigation is part one of a three-part response to the events of September 11 at the World Trade Center. The principal response of the Federal government to the terrorist attacks is, of course, to deal with those responsible for the attacks. Our job is a somewhat different one. Our purpose is to help assure that "we" – that is building researchers and professionals and others - are doing all that should be done to make buildings safe and secure. Whenever tragedy strikes, it is important to examine what happened in light of practices, standards and codes to consider possible areas for improvement, things that can be done to reduce the likelihood of similar events in the future. Earlier studies indicate, and our work to date supports the conclusion that the fires resulting from the aircraft impacts played a key role in the collapse of WTC Towers 1 and 2. Also, WTC 7 was apparently brought down primarily by fire since it appeared to sustain minimal structural damage from the attacks or subsequent collapse of Towers 1 and 2.

These events raise serious questions about the safety of buildings, especially tall buildings, in fires or other emergencies, and the procedures and systems employed for safety, evacuation or rescue, and for firefighting and emergency response to such buildings. All three elements of our WTC Response – an objective fact-finding investigation, further research and development, and subsequent technology dissemination and deployment activities are all aimed at one simple goal – to make buildings safer and do so cost-effectively.

The interviews we seek are important to our success. As Dr. Sunder will elaborate to date we have archived a massive amount of information – data, papers, photographs, videos, and so forth in an effort to establish a timeline of events. Yet, there are many significant gaps in our knowledge that personal accounts may help close. These include, for example:

- What was the state of the various building systems at the time of the attacks?
- What did people do?
- What sorts of barriers did they face, information did they need, and difficulties did they encounter?
- What sorts of damage or fire did they see or sounds did they hear?
- What were the office furnishings that were combustible?

These are just a few of the myriad of tiny details that will help us piece together a mosaic that will help us answer the difficult questions of how the buildings failed, and what can be done to reduce future risks from fire or other building emergencies.

We plan to talk to occupants, to first responders, and to those who were in touch with those trapped in the buildings. We recognize these interviews will be difficult. We will not compel anyone to talk to us as part of these interviews, but rather to seek open voluntary participation. We respect the privacy and dignity of all who were directly affected by this tragedy, and seek their help in working together to reduce the risks to future generations.

Last fall, weeks after the initiation of the NIST WTC investigation, the President signed into law the National Construction Safety Team Act. This law, which applies retroactively to the WTC investigation, gives NIST powers and authorities for investigating building failures that are similar in some respects to those available to the National Transportation Safety Board, NTSB, for carrying out investigations of transportation tragedies. I mention this because, over the years NTSB has earned a solid reputation not only for conducting objective, fair, and highly respected technical investigations, but also for being sensitive to the needs, concerns and dignity of those affected by tragedy. We likewise are doing all we can to earn the trust and respect of those we serve. In the coming days and weeks we will be reaching out directly to those who may be able to help us with these personal accounts. What you, the media say, and how you say it may influence their decisions to participate. We greatly appreciate this opportunity to work together with you to help get out the word.

Now, I wish to introduce Dr. Shyam Sunder, lead investigator of the NIST WTC Investigation. Dr. Sunder will kick off the briefing with an update on the progress of the investigation and some introductory remarks to the more detailed technical presentations by his colleagues Mr. Averill and Mr. Lawson on the first person data collection effort and the occupant behavior, evacuation, and emergency response studies.