

of overlapping expertise and responsibility.” The directive sought to accomplish this objective by designating, for different types of emergencies, an appropriate agency as “Incident Commander.” This Incident Commander would be “responsible for the management of the City’s response to the emergency,” while the OEM was “designated the ‘On Scene Interagency Coordinator.’”²⁹

Nevertheless, the FDNY and NYPD each considered itself operationally autonomous. As of September 11, they were not prepared to comprehensively coordinate their efforts in responding to a major incident. The OEM had not overcome this problem.

9.2 SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

As we turn to the events of September 11, we are mindful of the unfair perspective afforded by hindsight. Nevertheless, we will try to describe what happened in the following 102 minutes:

- the 17 minutes from the crash of the hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 into 1 World Trade Center (the North Tower) at 8:46 until the South Tower was hit
- the 56 minutes from the crash of the hijacked United Airlines Flight 175 into 2 World Trade Center (the South Tower) at 9:03 until the collapse of the South Tower
- the 29 minutes from the collapse of the South Tower at 9:59 until the collapse of the North Tower at 10:28

From 8:46 until 9:03 A.M.

At 8:46:40, the hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 flew into the upper portion of the North Tower, cutting through floors 93 to 99. Evidence suggests that all three of the building’s stairwells became impassable from the 92nd floor up. Hundreds of civilians were killed instantly by the impact. Hundreds more remained alive but trapped.³⁰

Civilians, Fire Safety Personnel, and 911 Calls

North Tower. A jet fuel fireball erupted upon impact and shot down at least one bank of elevators. The fireball exploded onto numerous lower floors, including the 77th and 22nd; the West Street lobby level; and the B4 level, four stories below ground. The burning jet fuel immediately created thick, black smoke that enveloped the upper floors and roof of the North Tower. The roof of the South Tower was also engulfed in smoke because of prevailing light winds from the northwest.³¹

Within minutes, New York City’s 911 system was flooded with eyewitness