

to one of the first fire chiefs to arrive, such a scenario was unimaginable, “beyond our consciousness.” As a result of the announcement, many civilians remained on their floors. Others reversed their evacuation and went back up.⁴⁶

Similar advice was given in person by security officials in both the ground-floor lobby—where a group of 20 that had descended by the elevators was personally instructed to go back upstairs—and in the upper sky lobby, where many waited for express elevators to take them down. Security officials who gave this advice were not part of the fire safety staff.⁴⁷

Several South Tower occupants called the Port Authority police desk in 5 WTC. Some were advised to stand by for further instructions; others were strongly advised to leave.⁴⁸

It is not known whether the order by the FDNY to evacuate the South Tower was received by the deputy fire safety director making announcements there. However, at approximately 9:02—less than a minute before the building was hit—an instruction over the South Tower’s public-address system advised civilians, generally, that they could begin an orderly evacuation if conditions warranted. Like the earlier advice to remain in place, it did not correspond to any prewritten emergency instruction.⁴⁹

FDNY Initial Response

Mobilization. The FDNY response began within five seconds of the crash. By 9:00, many senior FDNY leaders, including 7 of the 11 most highly ranked chiefs in the department, as well as the Commissioner and many of his deputies and assistants, had begun responding from headquarters in Brooklyn. While en route over the Brooklyn Bridge, the Chief of Department and the Chief of Operations had a clear view of the situation on the upper floors of the North Tower. They determined that because of the fire’s magnitude and location near the top of the building, their mission would be primarily one of rescue. They called for a fifth alarm, which would bring additional engine and ladder companies, as well as for two more elite rescue units. The Chief of Department arrived at about 9:00; general FDNY Incident Command was transferred to his location on the West Side Highway. In all, 22 of the 32 senior chiefs and commissioners arrived at the WTC before 10:00.⁵⁰

As of 9:00, the units that were dispatched (including senior chiefs responding to headquarters) included approximately 235 firefighters. These units consisted of 21 engine companies, nine ladder companies, four of the department’s elite rescue teams, the department’s single Hazmat team, two of the city’s elite squad companies, and support staff. In addition, at 8:53 nine Brooklyn units were staged on the Brooklyn side of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel to await possible dispatch orders.⁵¹

Operations. A battalion chief and two ladder and two engine companies arrived at the North Tower at approximately 8:52. As they entered the lobby, they encountered badly burned civilians who had been caught in the path of