

well B; these primarily were injured, handicapped, elderly, or severely overweight civilians, in some cases being assisted by other civilians.⁹⁹

By 9:59, tenants from the 91st floor had already descended the stairs and exited the concourse. However, a number of civilians remained in at least stairwell C, approaching lower floors. Other evacuees were killed earlier by debris falling on the street.¹⁰⁰

FDNY Response

Increased Mobilization. Immediately after the second plane hit, the FDNY Chief of Department called a second fifth alarm.¹⁰¹

By 9:15, the number of FDNY personnel en route to or present at the scene was far greater than the commanding chiefs at the scene had requested. Five factors account for this disparity. First, while the second fifth alarm had called for 20 engine and 8 ladder companies, in fact 23 engine and 13 ladder companies were dispatched. Second, several other units self-dispatched. Third, because the attacks came so close to the 9:00 shift change, many firefighters just going off duty were given permission by company officers to “ride heavy” and became part of those on-duty teams, under the leadership of that unit’s officer. Fourth, many off-duty firefighters responded from firehouses separately from the on-duty unit (in some cases when expressly told not to) or from home. The arrival of personnel in excess of that dispatched was particularly pronounced in the department’s elite units. Fifth, numerous additional FDNY personnel—such as fire marshals and firefighters in administrative positions—who lacked a predetermined operating role also reported to the WTC.¹⁰²

The Repeater System. Almost immediately after the South Tower was hit, senior FDNY chiefs in the North Tower lobby huddled to discuss strategy for the operations in the two towers. Of particular concern to the chiefs—in light of FDNY difficulties in responding to the 1993 bombing—was communications capability. One of the chiefs recommended testing the repeater channel to see if it would work.¹⁰³

Earlier, an FDNY chief had asked building personnel to activate the repeater channel, which would enable greatly-enhanced FDNY portable radio communications in the high-rises. One button on the repeater system activation console in the North Tower was pressed at 8:54, though it is unclear by whom. As a result of this activation, communication became possible between FDNY portable radios on the repeater channel. In addition, the repeater’s master handset at the fire safety desk could hear communications made by FDNY portable radios on the repeater channel. The activation of *transmission* on the master handset required, however, that a second button be pressed. That second button was never activated on the morning of September 11.¹⁰⁴

At 9:05, FDNY chiefs tested the WTC complex’s repeater system. Because the second button had not been activated, the chief on the master handset could