

Lack of Coordination among First Responder Agencies. Any attempt to establish a unified command on 9/11 would have been further frustrated by the lack of communication and coordination among responding agencies. Certainly, the FDNY was not “responsible for the management of the City’s response to the emergency,” as the Mayor’s directive would have required. The command posts were in different locations, and OEM headquarters, which could have served as a focal point for information sharing, did not play an integrating role in ensuring that information was shared among agencies on 9/11, even prior to its evacuation. There was a lack of comprehensive coordination between FDNY, NYPD, and PAPD personnel climbing above the ground floors in the Twin Towers.

Information that was critical to informed decisionmaking was not shared among agencies. FDNY chiefs in leadership roles that morning have told us that their decision making capability was hampered by a lack of information from NYPD aviation. At 9:51 A.M., a helicopter pilot cautioned that “large pieces” of the South Tower appeared to be about to fall and could pose a danger to those below. Immediately after the tower’s collapse, a helicopter pilot radioed that news. This transmission was followed by communications at 10:08, 10:15, and 10:22 that called into question the condition of the North Tower. The FDNY chiefs would have benefited greatly had they been able to communicate with personnel in a helicopter.

The consequence of the lack of real-time intelligence from NYPD aviation should not be overstated. Contrary to a widely held misperception, no NYPD helicopter predicted the fall of either tower before the South Tower collapsed, and no NYPD personnel began to evacuate the WTC complex prior to that time. Furthermore, the FDNY, as an institution, was in possession of the knowledge that the South Tower had collapsed as early as the NYPD, as its fall had been immediately reported by an FDNY boat on a dispatch channel. Because of internal breakdowns within the department, however, this information was not disseminated to FDNY personnel on the scene.

The FDNY, PAPD, and NYPD did not coordinate their units that were searching the WTC complex for civilians. In many cases, redundant searches of specific floors and areas were conducted. It is unclear whether fewer first responders in the aggregate would have been in the Twin Towers if there had been an integrated response, or what impact, if any, redundant searches had on the total number of first responder fatalities.

Whether the lack of coordination between the FDNY and NYPD on September 11 had a catastrophic effect has been the subject of controversy. We believe that there are too many variables for us to responsibly quantify those consequences. It is clear that the lack of coordination did not affect adversely the evacuation of civilians. It is equally clear, however, that the Incident Command System did not function to integrate awareness among agencies or to facilitate interagency response.²⁰⁸

If New York and other major cities are to be prepared for future terrorist