

On the north face, louvers were located in the window frames on the 5th floor, and tinted glass windows were used on the 6th floor to match the appearance of the upper stories. The view of any interior fires on the 5th floor was blocked by the exhaust plenum walls at the east and west ends and by the bank of transformer vaults along the center of the north face. To become visible from the north, a 5th floor fire would have had to be of sufficient intensity to breach the transformer vault or the exhaust plenum. By contrast, a fire on the north side of the 6th floor would have been almost as visible (due to the tinted glass) as on one of the tenant floors. Since there was essentially no combustible material to support a significant fire on the 6th floor, the flames from a significant fire on the 5th floor would have had to penetrate one of the aluminum plenum walls or collapse a portion of the 6th floor slab. In addition, if there were an underventilated fire on the 5th floor, unburned pyrolysis products could have spread through such a gap and, if ignited, burned on the 6th floor. NIST found no photographic records or eyewitness accounts of smoke or fires that could be attributed to fires on these floors.

3.3.3 Floors 7 and 8

American Express moved into Floors 7 and 8 in 1994 and was the first tenant in that space. Their layouts, as of October 2000, are depicted in Figure 3–3 and Figure 3–4.² The flooring material was 46 cm (18 in.) square carpet tiles of unknown composition. The walls were painted, with some poster art. There was a limited amount of fluoropolymer-insulated fire alarm and security cabling above the suspended ceiling tiles. Communications cabling ran through raceways in the floor slabs. There were some firestopped holes in the 8th floor slab for communication cables between the two floors.

The north side of the 7th floor was filled with clusters of cubicles and a few walled offices. On the east side of the 7th floor was a large data center, whose walls ran from slab to slab. A vault in the middle of the south side contained, among other equipment, three generators to provide emergency power for the Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management (OEM), located on the 23rd floor. The vault also contained a 1.25 m³ (275 gal) fuel tank for the generators. Approximately 650 m² (7,000 ft²) of space on the west side of the floor had been vacated (in exchange for space on the 13th floor) in 1997. Employees of the Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management said that they were using the vacated space for storage. The people who had occupied the area between the west face and the building core had been moved to the 13th floor, and the 7th floor space had been turned over to Silverstein Properties, which intended to use it for storage. There might have been little combustible material in this space.

Virtually all the 8th floor was densely filled with clusters of cubicles. Along the west wall was a small vault that had contained a single emergency power generator and a 1.25 m³ (275 gal) fuel tank until 2000 (Section 3.4.2). The vault walls ran slab to slab and were fire-rated. The generator and fuel tank had been removed prior to September 11, 2001.³

American Express did not require employees to clear their desktops at the end of a workday. However, the offices were generally neat, as they did nightly sweeps to avoid clutter and for fire safety. Some of their material was stored in lateral file cabinets, and a lot of material was stored in a nearby building to maximize the availability of space for staff.

² Floor plans provided by American Express and supplemented by NIST interviews with American Express staff, April and May 2006.

³ Letter from Trammel Crow Company (as manager for American Express) to Silverstein Properties, dated April 12, 2002.