

Meanwhile, people continued their evacuation. By 9:36 a.m., almost 7,000 of the 8,600 occupants had left the building. From the impact floors and above, 18 occupants had discovered that the hot, smoke-filled, debris-laden Stairway A was not fully blocked and had made their way to survival. It is not known how many more of the 619 other people who had been on or above the impact floors became aware of this, but none made it out of the building. There are no records of information regarding this escape route having been collected and transmitted to others who might have been able to use it.

The PAPD, NYPD, and FDNY centers were now being inundated with calls from the two buildings. In the confusion, some of the callers did not identify which building they were in. At 9:12 a.m., PAPD was notified that the WTC 2 floor warden phones were not working. Other calls alerted them to trapped and injured people. At 9:18 a.m., FDNY reported that they had a single elevator working to floor 40. A simultaneous call indicated that FDNY was relocating its command post across West Street. At 9:30 a.m., EMS set up a triage desk in the lobby of WTC 2.

3.6 9:36 A.M. TO 9:58 A.M. EDT

By 9:58 a.m., all but eleven of the occupants who had been below the impact floors had left the building and crossed the street to safety.

The fires continued to burn in the east half of the building.

At 9:55 a.m., firefighters communicated that they had reached floor 55 of WTC 2, one of the few calls for which a record survived indicating how high the responders had reached. Before WTC 2 collapsed, firefighters had reached the 78th floor by using the single functioning elevator to the 40th floor and then climbing the stairs.

The physical condition of the tower had deteriorated seriously. The inward bowing of columns on the east wall spread along the east face. The east wall lost its ability to support gravity loads, and, consequently, redistributed the loads to the weakened core through the hat truss and to the adjacent north and south walls through the spandrels. But the loads could not be supported by the weakened structure, and the entire section of the building above the impact zone began tilting as a rigid block to the east and south (Figure 3–5). Column failure continued from the east wall around the corners to the north and south faces. The top of the building continued to tilt to the east and south, as, at 9:58:59 a.m., WTC 2 began to collapse.