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THE HOT ZONE

Battery Park Set to Reopen To Residents Of North End

By RANDAL C. ARCHIBOLD

More than a week after the World Trade Center attack, officials will begin allowing Battery Park City residents to return to their homes today, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani announced yesterday.

Officials were working to open the northern part last night, but the likelihood was that the opening would occur today, officials said. Within the the next few days, they said, they hoped to reopen the southern end of the office and condominium complex, which is home to 9,000 people.

Richard Sheirer, director of the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, said that the complex was allowed to open because officials are no longer using one of its buildings for a meeting place for police and National Guard officials, and utility service has been restored.

He was less optimistic about other residential buildings closer to the World Trade Center that are within a restricted area known as the "hot zone, a military term for the core of the action." He did not have a figure for how many people live or work in that area, but he said he recognized that many are anxiously waiting to get back. "Being displaced is not fun," he said.

But the perimeter of the hot zone, off limits to just about everyone but emergency workers and law enforcement officers, has changed little.

The zone is bounded by Chambers Street on the north, Broadway on the east, Rector Street on the south and West Street on the west. Officials said yesterday that today they may allow some access to Broadway, though not the area west of it. Residents are allowed in only with escorts.

Some restrictions may not change for the near future, the officials said, because some buildings and transportation routes near the scene are being heavily used by emergency workers. Students at Stuyvesant High School and the Borough of Manhattan Community College are not expected to return to their buildings before Oct. 1. The Brooklyn-Battery and Holland Tunnels are closed indefinitely.

Mr. Sheirer's office has been instrumental in making such decisions and determining the boundaries of restricted areas.

Right after the planes crashed into the World Trade Center, as he stood in the lobby of the north tower, absorbing the magnitude of the disaster, Mr. Sheirer made the call to close Manhattan below 14th Street.

"I recognized the breadth of the problem," he said with a bit of understatement. He did not consult a map. He acted from the gut, knowing from the experience of the 1993 bombing of the trade center that hundreds, if not thousands, of emergency workers needed to descend on the scene and that 14th Street marked the rough northern boundary of Lower Manhattan.

Since then, the decision of what to close and when has gotten more sophisticated, employing scrutiny of maps and the advice of field commanders representing the Police and Fire Departments, federal law enforcement authorities and utility company representatives.

The overriding concern, especially in the first days after the disaster, Mr. Sheirer said, was ensuring access for emergency workers and law enforcement officers and the truckers hired to haul away debris.

But officials also took into account other factors, principally whether utility services were working and whether residential and commercial structures near the disaster were structurally sound. Mr. Sheirer said nobody wanted people stumbling around darkened buildings that may have been damaged.

So far, he said, no residential or commercial building outside the immediate disaster area has been condemned, although officials are "watching" several commercial buildings that were damaged.

One other factor officials considered in drawing up the off-limits zones was gawkers.

"We didn't want this to be a tourist site," Mr. Sheirer said. At the same time, the city did not want to keep people out of their businesses and homes for long periods. That is why the boundary for limited pedestrian and vehicle access — open mainly to those who live or work in the area — has moved steadily south from 14th to Houston to Canal Streets over the past several days.

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