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TERRORIST ATTACKS

Landfill Site of Search for Evidence

Workers look for clues, remains in debris

By Mae M. Cheng
STAFF WRITER

An American flag dangles from a red-painted crane at the heavily guarded entrance to the Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island. This giant dump is now a fortress set up for the more than 1 million tons of debris that once was the World Trade Center.

Forensic pathologists and anthropologists are working with officials from the FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the New York Police Department to painstakingly sift through the rubble as a military helicopter circles overhead.

By late yesterday, nearly 41,000 tons of debris had been hauled to the site — mostly by truck convoys — for the search for evidence and human remains.

"It's just mind-boggling to think of every truck that has to be sifted through," said Clinton Van Zandt, a retired 25-year veteran of the FBI who worked on the Oklahoma City bombing and the Unabomber cases. "They're sifting through it as one would looking for gold."

Dogs also are sniffing through the debris. Refrigerated trucks store body parts before they are transported to the city medical examiner's office.

"It's the largest crime scene in the history of modern criminal history," Van Zandt said.

At Ground Zero, where the Twin Towers collapsed, another task force from the Commerce Department, the Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. attorney's office and inspector general's office of the Department of Justice also was sifting through debris.

A task force of federal agents quietly working alongside the "bucket brigades" has collected 20 to 30 airplane parts from the wreckage, including what is believed to be a pilot's seat from the cockpit of one jet, federal law enforcement sources said.

Except for the seat, none of the airplane parts is more than 2 feet long, illustrating the force of the explosion and collapse, the sources said.

For almost a week, trucks, some as big as 22-wheelers, have been making the 45-minute run from the Twin Towers site, through the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, across the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, onto Route 440 to the landfill. Some debris also has arrived by barge. Most of the 3,000-acre landfill site has been closed to the public for the investigation. Truck drivers said it's an emotionally draining experience. Their cargo contains mostly debris from the fallen buildings. But every so often, there are the grim reminders of the human tragedy, such as office stationery or personal belongings.

"It's not a good feeling," said Francisco Cintron, 22, of the Castle Hill section of the Bronx.

Cintron has made numerous runs between the World Trade Center and the landfill since he started Wednesday. While most drivers are on 12-hour shifts, Cintron has chosen to work around the clock. The only exception was midnight to noon Saturday, when he went home to be with his 4-year-old son, who was asking questions about the terrorist attack.

"I want to get the job done," said Cintron, who explained that he naps in the hours when his truck is being loaded and unloaded. "I just want to get it cleaned up."

Staff writers Graham Rayman and Dan Janison contributed to this story.



A crane unloads debris from the attacks at Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island.

Photo by Ray Huminski



Newsday

Retaining Walls Keeping Water Away

By Bryn Nelson
STAFF WRITER

In the aftermath of the World Trade Center terrorist attack, initial assessments indicate that the center's enormous retaining walls — the so-called slurry walls — have continued to keep the Hudson River at bay.

"Based on what engineers have seen, the slurry wall seems to be doing what it was meant to do, which is to keep water out of the site," said Martha Huguet, a marketing manager for Mueser Rutledge Consulting Engineers, which is coordinating the underground structural engineering assessments.

"We believe if anything is cracked or in any way compromised, it can be repaired," she said. "And that's what we're doing, coming up with different contingencies and different procedures for what to do to support the foundation box if any damage is found."

Concerning unconfirmed reports that the retaining walls may have been badly damaged, Huguet said an assessment is ongoing but has not revealed extensive damage so far.

The foundations of the World Trade Center include seven basement levels, including the shopping concourse and levels B1 to B6. Huguet said structural engineers have gained partial access to some of those levels through emergency shafts and subway tunnels, but only after Fire Department officials have deemed the area safe and provided escorts. She said engineers were trying to reach the B5 level, which serves as *the PATH train concourse, yesterday* evening to better assess the tunnels and World Trade Center slurry walls.

The walls, which are composed of about three feet of reinforced concrete, extend 60 feet below ground and form a box measuring 500 feet wide by 1,000 feet long, bordered by Liberty Street to the south, West Street to the west, Vesey Street to the north and Greenwich Street to the east. They encompass what remains of both the north and south towers of the complex.

"The walls are socketed two feet into rock," Huguet said, "so it's got a very solid foundation."

Built before the Battery Park City addition, an old Hudson River bulkhead on the other side of West Street also likely protects the complex from encroachment by the river.

Huguet said structural engineers also began the painstaking process of assessing the subway tunnels over the weekend, discovering that some survived relatively intact while others fared less well. Engineers gained access to the subway tunnels for the N and R lines, which skirt the World Trade Center complex to the east, from the Church Street station near Dey Street. These tunnels appear to have fared well.

In contrast, Huguet said that once engineers gained access to the 1 and 9 subway tunnels running directly beneath the Trade Center's concourse level they found the tunnels were "not in good shape." None of the lines in the area have reopened.

Engineers examining the shuttered PATH tunnels at Exchange Place in New Jersey last week reported about six inches of water above the track, the only tunnel in which Huguet said water had been seen by her firm's engineers. But pumping has removed much of that water, which engineers say could have come from firefighting efforts or broken pipes. The PATH tunnels, at level B5 under the World Trade Center, slope toward Exchange Place, where the tunnels are between 12 and 20 feet below the complex.

"So that's where the water would go if there was a leak," Huguet said. "If the slurry wall was breached or damaged, it wouldn't look like it could be controlled by that."

Columbia University geotechnical engineer Hoe Ling said retaining walls such as those used in the World Trade Center foundations were not designed to handle the tremendous load of the collapsing floors. Walls that are deformed or breached could destabilize the ground in the immediate area, theoretically posing a risk to rescue and recovery operations, Ling said. But he said the risk of destabilization would likely not extend to surrounding skyscrapers since they have their own pile foundations, or "legs," with separate slurry walls.

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