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At the Site, Little Hope Of Uncovering Survivors

The Chance Is Small, Giuliani Says

By SUSAN SACHS

With little more than mammoth knots of steel and pulverized concrete remaining of the World Trade Center, officials acknowledged yesterday that it was unlikely that anyone in the buildings, even in the underground concourses, had survived the inferno of the towers' collapse last week.

"We have to prepare people for the overwhelming reality that the chance of recovering anyone alive is very, very small," Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani said. "We still hope and pray, but the chance is very, very small."

It was the bluntest assessment yet from the mayor about the fate of more than 5,000 people still listed as missing in the trade center attack.

A survivor was wrenched out of the rubble last Wednesday. Only bodies or parts of bodies have been recovered since.

One encouraging bit of news, at least for the investigation, came late yesterday, when a law enforcement official said the "pinging" of a black box from a hijacked plane might have been detected.

"They are picking up some pinging, but there is so much stuff on top of it, including ironwork, that it will take some time for them to get to it," the official said.

Mr. Giuliani's grim appraisal of the search efforts foretold an impending shift in operations at the site of the devastation, away from the careful raking of debris in search of body parts to a more straightforward demolition job.

Seven days after the disaster, contractors clearing rubble at the site said they had yet to reach even the area where the twin towers had stood, except occasionally with the aid of mechanical talons at the ends of huge cranes.

The city's fire commissioner, Thomas Von Essen, said the search and rescue operation at the scene had not yet changed. Then he added, "But it will, we believe, in a few days, if we continue to find what we're finding when we penetrate."

Neither he nor the mayor would say what rescuers had found when they penetrated the indescribably dank and dark crevices of the debris.

"I think when we get closer to that," the mayor said, "we'll explain that."

At the collapse site — a 16-acre moonscape of twisted steel, gutted buildings and pyramids of crushed concrete — the atmosphere was already different as the giant metal claws of heavy equipment began attacking mounds of debris.

Fresh reinforcements have replaced the soot-coated police officers and firefighters who, just a day or two ago, sagged into abandoned chairs on the edges of the rubble. The gray dust that coated the sidewalks has been swept and hosed away.

The frenzied activity of the early days, sometimes fueled by sheer will and hope, has become a determined but systematic routine. Most of the bucket brigades, weary men who stood shoulder to shoulder passing five-gallon pails of debris out of the smoldering piles of wreckage, have disbanded. Their white and orange buckets have been stacked along the perimeter of the devastation.

Even the fires that burned beneath rubble piles were spent. Most of the smoke and dust that shrouded the area with a stinging pall had all but dissipated, laying bare the trade center's deformed remains.

What the workers have found has amazed and appalled them: sky-

Within the rubble, pinging is detected, perhaps from a jet's black box.

scrapers built of several millions of cubic yards of concrete seemed to have ground themselves into dust.

Most of what they have seen on the exposed layers of debris has been pieces of the aluminum face of the towers and mangled steel. They have not seen many chunks of concrete.

The scene underground apparently is just as devastating.

Transit officials estimated that 1,000 feet of the No. 1 subway line tunnel beneath the World Trade Center, including the Cortlandt Street station, had collapsed.

"We see debris floor to ceiling, wall to wall," said Al O'Leary, the chief spokesman for New York City Transit.

The Rector Street Station on the No. 1 line was also damaged, officials said, but was not structurally unsound.

They said the Cortlandt Street station on the N and R line was also severely damaged and had structural problems. Although falling steel beams appeared to have pierced tunnels at that station, they predicted that repairs could be completed on the line in a few weeks.

Mr. Von Essen, in a briefing, gave a grim view of what the levels below the trade center towers might look like, saying firefighters have been unable to penetrate fully to the underground shopping concourse.

"We're finding in some areas where there might be a void, the level of heat is so much that no one would have been able to survive," he said. "I just don't want to say yet that we've exhausted all of our abilities to reach every area that we think might be possible. So I just need a little bit more time."

On the surface, the street-level plaza that once covered part of that concourse between the twin towers is now a gaping hole. The site has been divided into four rough quadrants and assigned to different contractors and heavy equipment operators.

At the western edge of the site, crews finally managed to clear West Street of debris from a collapsed pedestrian bridge, allowing bigger cranes and excavators to be brought closer to the pile of compacted wreckage that once was 2 World Trade Center.

But tremendous mounds of rubble, mainly from the destroyed Marriott Hotel, still separated workers from the base of the downed tower, the southernmost of the two 110-story twin towers that were pierced by hijacked airliners last week.

The rubble stands as high as a six-story building, said Peter Marchetto, president of Bovis Lend Lease, a New York City construction company that has been assigned the southwest quadrant.

"The buildings came down and spread out to West Street and in every direction," he said. "To get to the towers you now have to work

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your way in. That's what everybody has been trying to do, to work their way in."

His crews are still 100 feet away from the tower, but can now use a new wave of heavy equipment, including cranes that can reach across the debris and try to pick out the gnarled masses of steel.

Clearing away the debris to get to the physical foundations of the southern tower could take up to two months, Mr. Marchetto said.

At the northwest corner, three construction companies are working to clear the damaged or destroyed buildings standing in the way of access to parts of 1 World Trade Center, the northern tower.

Two buildings, 5 and 6 World Trade Center, have essentially been gutted by fire, said Peter J. Davoren, a senior vice president of Turner Construction Company. The rubble that once was 7 World Trade Center, a building believed to have been evacuated before it was hit by debris from the collapse, is still burning. By late yesterday, crews working from baskets suspended by cranes over 7 World Trade Center were cutting lengths of twisted steel to be removed.

"You're going to see a lot of the smaller machines, the ones that we were using for search and rescue to pick through areas, leave," said Anthony Novello, an owner of Nacirema Industries, a company working in the northwest quadrant. "Now you're going to see the big ones, the 220,000-pound machines, that are not made for the gingerly removal."

Complicating the work at the scene are potential health hazards.

The magnitude of work still to be done is staggering. Mayor Giuliani said yesterday that 49,553 tons of debris had been transported to the Fresh Kills landfill from the site.

Ted Monette, the federal coordinator of the cleanup, said experts estimate that 1.2 million tons of debris would have to be removed. The job could take six months.

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