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THE RETAINING WALL

Officials Report No Threat Of Flooding From the Hudson

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A retaining wall designed to keep the Hudson River out of the World Trade Center's seven-story basement appears sound and seems to be doing its job, according to engineers who have ventured beneath the scene of last week's collapse of the World Trade Center towers.

Some of the underground floors, moreover, have not collapsed and are intact, the engineers say.

The engineers' conclusions were reinforced yesterday by Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, who, in referring to the retaining wall, said at a news conference that "there is no reason to believe that that's been cracked."

"We've gone over that in great detail, and there does not appear to be any concern at all," Mr. Giuliani said. "If there is any issue with that when the extrication is done, it will be done very, very carefully so there is no damage done."

The mayor sought to dispel fears about the retaining wall among residents of Battery Park City, some of whom moved back into Battery Park City North on Thursday. He said other buildings in the complex would reopen over the next week.

But Mr. Giuliani said it remained unclear when some Battery Park City residents could return, and advised them to seek updates from their building management.

In some cases, he said, the Battery Park City Authority would help residents find different apartments. But he urged people not to give up on their Battery Park City homes.

In checking on the condition of the retaining wall, engineers, following the lead of firefighters looking for survivors, have squeezed through subway tunnels and past piles of debris like spelunkers. They have gotten six levels below the ground floor of the trade center, one level above the PATH train tracks, and have been able to inspect the retaining wall in some spots, said George Tamaro, of Mueser Rutledge Consulting Engineers.

Mr. Tamaro and his firm have been hired by the city's Department of Design and Construction to advise on structural matters underground.

"The wall looks pretty good," he said. "There are probably some leaks, but they are manageable."

Engineers have been concerned about the wall — or the bathtub, as it is called — because, as designed, the trade center's basement floors alone are bracing the wall against the pressure of water and muck from outside. The engineers say piles of debris may be keeping the wall in place. Removing the debris without proper precaution could cause a rupture in the bathtub, resulting in the basement flooding and the destabilization of other buildings nearby.

Engineers say the wall will have to be supported by anchors known as tiebacks driven through the wall and into bedrock beyond, while the basement is cleared of rubble. How long this will take, and the exact procedure and the number of tiebacks needed, will depend on how much of the underground structure remains intact, Mr. Tamaro said.

"I'm trying to go at this slowly and calmly," he said.

In addition to the foundations of four buildings — the two main towers, a Marriott hotel and 6 World Trade Center — the basement also housed seven levels of shopping, parking and a PATH train station.

Meanwhile, construction has begun on a pair of concrete plugs in the PATH tubes at the Exchange Place station in Jersey City to block water. The tracks in New Jersey were about six inches under water, presumably because of broken water pipes, rain and fire hoses. Mr. Tamaro said the water service to the basement had now been shut off.

Engineers find much of the seven-story basement is intact.

Mr. Giuliani said yesterday that residents who began moving back into Battery Park City on Thursday continued to face inconveniences because of the cleanup effort at the trade center, but he said he was pleased that the buildings in the residential complex were being reopened.

"The people in Battery Park City North went in yesterday, and I can't say all of them have been able to get in, but most have," the mayor said. "Although it is somewhat inconvenient because you have to walk a circuitous route to get there, I think it's better we were able to get Battery Park City North open."

Mr. Giuliani said several buildings in Battery Park City South were expected to be open for occupancy at 8 a.m. today. The buildings include Liberty Terrace, Battery Pointe, Liberty Court, South Cove Plaza, River Watch, Cove Club and the Regatta.

He said the Soundings, Liberty View and Hudson View East were scheduled to reopen on Monday, River Rose would reopen on Tuesday, and Liberty House would reopen on Wednesday.

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