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Missing toll dips by 387

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The number of people reported missing in the World Trade Center ruins dropped by nearly 400 yesterday even as the death toll continued to slowly rise.

Mayor Giuliani said the official tally of the missing declined to 5,960 from 6,347 after police found duplications in the various lists being compiled by city hospitals and rescue agencies.

"In some cases," Giuliani said, police were "actually finding people, particularly foreign nationals, who have been reported missing but were actually somewhere in the United States."

The mayor noted the number of missing, which has seesawed almost daily since the Sept. 11 attacks, could change again. He said that so far 4,620 people have been registered as missing at the Family Assistance Center on Pier 94, giving hope the missing number could further decline.

As the missing list fell by 387, officials reported that five more bodies have been recovered from the wreckage, bringing the confirmed dead to 305.

A group of grieving relatives who made the pilgrimage to Ground Zero to leave flowers for their missing loved ones yesterday were steered away from the corner where firefighters found the mangled remains of some women near the ruins of the Commodities Exchange.

"We've been finding a lot of bodies the past two days at the corner of Liberty and Greenwich, where the south tower fell on Building 4," said a construction foreman who asked not to be identified. "The bodies are mostly female civilians. They were all in that area."

3 female bodies found

No survivors have been found since a day after the Sept. 11 attacks. Sources at Ground Zero said three female bodies were found yesterday — one of them mostly intact, one headless, one just a torso.

Firefighters and paramedics paused to pray after finding one of the bodies. They took off their helmets, removed their masks, and a few brushed away tears as a chaplain kneeled by the body and said a prayer.

"We haven't recovered a significant number of additional bodies," Giuliani said later. "We have a very large number of unidentified parts of bodies."

He said investigators will have to compare the pieces with available DNA information "and that's going to take a while."

As Giuliani steered the city through the crisis, he drew kudos from Queen Rania Al-Abdullah of Jordan, the latest foreign leader to visit New York in a show of solidarity.

"For many years to come, when people study leadership, yours will certainly be a case study," she said.

A grateful Giuliani replied, "We hope we can count on your support."

Meanwhile, hundreds of feet beneath the wreckage, Transit Authority workers fitted 3-foot-thick concrete plugs into the tunnel walls at both ends of the shattered Cortlandt St. station on the 1 and 9 subway lines.

The plugs are a precaution to prevent water from seeping into the subways through the Trade Center foundation, said TA spokesman Al O'Leary. "So far, there hasn't been a problem," he said. "But the damage here is incredible — the bottom line is that this stretch of subway is a total loss."

TA officials estimate that 1,500 feet of tunnel on those lines collapsed after the terrorist attack.

"There are beams from the Trade Center that punctured the tunnel both north and south of the Fulton St. station," O'Leary said. "In other sections, the roof is sagging. It will take years to repair."

No estimates on 1/9 line

O'Leary said it was too soon to tell when the 1 and 9 lines will reopen — or give a cost estimate for the work.

Officials said the tunnels and stations on the N and R lines in the Trade Center area were in much better shape. They hope to reopen those stations in six months or less.

Above, at Ground Zero, the jagged facade of 2 World Trade Center continued to defy attempts to tear it down.

For three days, construction workers have tried to level the last standing piece of the twin towers. Around 3 p.m., they were able to partially tear off a 15-foot-by-40-foot chunk, which hung like a flap.

Workers, using fortified cables and giant cranes, slammed the piece against the ruins over and over, trying to separate it from the rest.

"It was a magnificent sight," Frederick McDavid, 45, said of the twin towers as he watched the work from his print shop at Washington and Rector Sts. "It's difficult to watch it come down piece by piece."

Giuliani had ordered gawkers not to photograph the wreckage and posted warnings on barricades that cameras would be confiscated. Only a few defied his edict yesterday as police and National Guardsmen positioned at some of the vantage points around the disaster site kept watch.

A steady stream of dump trucks hauled huge chunks of the fallen towers out of Ground Zero. Giuliani said 128,050 tons of debris have been removed so far — barely a tenth of the rubble that still smoldered yesterday.

Truck drivers and rescue workers leaving the wreckage were greeted by cheering New Yorkers on the West Side Highway who waved the Stars and Stripes and held up signs that said, "Yo, Stay Strong!" and "Keep it Up."

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