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Firm claims 250M in gold, silver salvaged from WTC

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A Toronto-based trader of precious metals stepped up yesterday to claim $250 million worth of gold and silver recovered from the ruins of the World Trade Center.

"We are working with the authorities to assure a safe relocation," said Pam Agnew, a spokeswoman for Scotia Mocatta, the bullion and precious metals division of the Bank of Nova Scotia.

The metals were hauled out by Brink's trucks late Tuesday in a heavily guarded operation. Agnew said the vault was removed because the city wants to demolish what remains of 4 World Trade Center, where Scotia Mocatta had offices.

In recent days, construction workers cleared a delivery tunnel that ran underneath the complex. After clearing debris from the tunnel, workers found the vault.

Access to the area was restricted. Federal agents armed with shotguns stood guard as the lode was carted out.

City officials said little about the find. Bank officials also offered few details.

"To discuss it further could put people at risk," said Agnew, who would not estimate the value of the metals.

New York Mercantile Exchange records show the bank had 31 million ounces of silver, 380,000 ounces of gold and 2,600 ounces of platinum as of Sept. 10.

Police sources had earlier put the value at $500 million. Despite yesterday's lower valuation, Mayor Giuliani said most of the missing cache had been recovered.

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