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## NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

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### **First public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States**

#### **Statement of Ken Holden to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States April 1, 2003**

Good afternoon Chairman Kean, Vice-Chair Hamilton and Members of the Commission. My name is Kenneth Holden and I am the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Design and Construction. Thank you for allowing me to appear in front of you today.

The City's Department of Design and Construction - DDC - was created by the Mayor in 1996 to consolidate most of the City's capital construction programs. Its mission is to streamline the design and construction of the City's infrastructure and facilities by ensuring that the City's projects are delivered in a safe, timely, and cost-effective manner.

### **Current News**

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The Commission has released its final report. [\[more\]](#)

The Chair and Vice Chair have released a statement regarding the Commission's closing. [\[more\]](#)

The Commission closed August 21, 2004. [\[more\]](#)

### **Commission Members**

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Thomas H. Kean  
*Chair*

Lee H. Hamilton  
*Vice Chair*

DDC's clients include OEM, the Police, Fire, Environmental Protection, Transportation, Aging, Juvenile Justice, Correction, Health and Cultural Affairs Departments; the Administration for Children's Services; the Human Resources Administration; the public library systems and the Board of Education.

## **9/11/01**

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was preparing to leave my office in Long Island City for a meeting at City Hall when I first learned that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. I immediately went into downtown Manhattan, and was on the steps of City Hall when the first tower collapsed. I, along with many others that day, ran north. Eventually, around 11:00 that morning, I ended up at One Police Plaza, which was being set up as a command center. It was there that DDC's role began.

## **DDC's Role**

We realized that the entire infrastructure of the Port Authority, which was headquartered in the North Tower and is the owner of the site, had been decimated, and therefore a response from them was likely impossible. FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers had not arrived yet. I thus began trying to get contractors and structural engineers to the site to conduct a walkthrough, in order to assess the stability of the site and the scope of the response needed. DDC was uniquely qualified to jump into action in this emergency: we had many construction project managers and engineers on staff with significant and varied experience and we had established numerous contacts with experienced firms that could immediately mobilize the equipment and personnel needed to help with the search and rescue operation. Our ability to draw on our own internal expertise and these widespread outside contacts allowed for the quick and efficient decision-making this situation required.

Richard Ben-Veniste  
Fred F. Fielding  
Jamie S. Gorelick  
Slade Gorton  
Bob Kerrey  
John F. Lehman  
Timothy J. Roemer  
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## **Commission Staff**

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Philip D. Zelikow  
*Executive Director*

Chris Kojm  
*Deputy Executive  
Director*

Daniel Marcus  
*General Counsel*

At approximately 5:00 that evening, I conducted a walkthrough with several engineers and construction managers. The immediate need was for lighting, since all electricity was out. I spent Tuesday night and Wednesday in a mad scramble to locate light towers to illuminate the site, and also to bring in heavy equipment to lift debris, so that fire fighters could fight fires, and the search and rescue efforts could go on. We worked closely with the Police Department to set up police escorts to get the contractors over the bridges.

DDC staff was pulled from their regular duties to organize and manage demolition, excavation and debris removal operations. Many worked 18-hour days, seven days a week, to respond to the emergency.

In the first days, I recall being stunned by rescue efforts to lift and demolish the north pedestrian bridge with many fire trucks underneath, and wondering if there were any survivors. I watched a priest praying over the smoldering remains of Building 7, and ran into a contractor and cried on his shoulder. However, I could not allow myself much time to feel, because we assumed there were survivors in the piles of debris and we had to come up with plan to get them out.

Using emergency procurement procedures, four construction companies were hired on a "time and material" basis. Those firms hired numerous subcontractors for scaffolding and netting, demolition, health and safety planning and monitoring, hazardous materials removal, shoring, structural engineering, and hauling and barging.

In cooperation with the Port Authority, the Fire Department, Police Department and numerous other agencies, DDC handled hundreds of details and questions every hour. The site was immediately and immensely hazardous for

rescue and clean up workers. We divided the site into quadrants and placed netting on surrounding buildings, to secure the site for the rescue effort. We came up with a Site Safety Plan to address hazards throughout the site, from cranes dangling ironworkers in baskets facing precariously leaning pieces of the towers, to voids in the debris that could swallow a grappler.

Just walking on the site was hazardous because the debris could shift at any moment. Yet hundreds of fire fighters, police officers, rescue workers, laborers, crane operators, iron workers, construction management personnel and DDC staffers worked around the clock in close proximity to literally hundreds of potentially dangerous objects and situations. Throughout this time, the war-like atmosphere was surreal, with Army, National Guard and NYPD providing armed security.

Quick, but safe decisions regarding where to put the cranes had to be made, inspection of the slurry wall and water in the basement were conducted, while numerous fires were still burning and smoldering. Underground it was still so hot that molten metal dripped down the sides of the wall from Building 6. Cars - both burned and pristine - were suspended in the air balanced on cracked parking garage slabs.

Along with the Buildings Department and the Structural Engineers Association of New York, DDC assessed 400 buildings in the surrounding area for structural integrity. Over 200 engineers worked - above and below ground - to monitor the structural integrity of the buildings that surround the World Trade Center complex, to ensure that the debris pile remained stable during the debris removal and to monitor the stability of the slurry wall.

There was constant inter-agency coordination, and daily meetings were held, which included many Federal, State and City agencies.

Government agencies brushed aside their normal bureaucratic tendencies and effectively said to one another, "What can we do to help?" Although FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers usually take over disaster sites, to their credit, they recognized that DDC had pulled together an effective team of the best and brightest, so instead they worked with us. They told the City to continue its work and they guided us to make sure we were doing the work in a manner that would allow FEMA to reimburse us. They allowed us to use "time and materials" contracts, which they do not normally allow.

Police officers, fire fighters and Port Authority Police officers spent countless hours searching for survivors and remains. DOT re-routed traffic, the Mayor's Community Affairs unit set up a family assistance center and consoled families of victims, the Fire Department put out fires, the National Guard and Police Department provided security, the Department of Sanitation cleaned the site and watered down the streets, and OEM mobilized command centers at the Police Academy and Pier 92 from which it supplied the coordination and organizational focus necessary to complete a job of this magnitude and complexity.

Throughout the operation, finding survivors, and then later human remains, was always the priority. But to do that we had to be able to remove the debris and steel. Cooperation between Federal, State and City agencies was especially crucial in setting up barging operations at Piers 25 and 6, to handle the staggering amount of steel and other debris that had to be removed from the site. The Fresh Kills Landfill, which was closed, was re-opened and mobilized to accept the steel and debris from the site. Steel and debris from the site was sent to Fresh Kills where it was examined and sifted. As the Department of Sanitation could no longer handle the steel with their equipment, and our engineers thought the steel would destabilize the landfill, DDC received verbal permission to

ship the steel to New Jersey. By the end of June 2002, an astounding total of over 1.6 million tons of steel and other debris were removed from the site.

As the site became more a reconstruction area, infrastructure coordination was required to handle numerous concerns, including massive amounts of conduit in the streets; sewer, water main and street repair; reducing the perimeter to allow businesses and residents to return; establishing roads in the World Trade Center complex; fewer cranes, more grapplers; continued focus on site safety; and equipment maintenance, especially in view of the strain of keeping machines operating 24/7 in the extreme conditions of heat and dust; all the while trying to remain sensitive to the emotions of victims' families and uniformed rescuers, proceeding with dignity and solemnity, and trying to get the job done safely.

## **Conclusions**

What's happening now and what are our plans for the future? DDC is working together with OEM to address future preparedness concerns and to make sure efforts are coordinated, and in fact, is currently re-building OEM's new emergency command center. DDC and OEM have received a grant to create a protocol for emergency responses for contractors, and specifications for procuring contractors in the event of an emergency.

Please urge Congress to enact legislation providing for federal indemnity, making it clear that contractors can go in and do the work in the event of another disaster, and not incur liability. The four construction companies that DDC contacted put aside other business and standard operating practices and responded with a sense of patriotism, working without contracts. The indemnity issues remain unresolved, and these companies have been incredibly patient. However, the costs of

defending themselves against lawsuits may be economically devastating, and such considerations could prove prohibitive, in the event they are called upon again.

### **What we can be proud of**

The largest and most emotional rescue and recovery job in American history was also an exceptionally safe project, due to a combination of our safety plan and its enforcement, and luck. There were no deaths and minimal injuries; which is absolutely incredible, in view of the magnitude of this job and its hazards.

The work that the City and its employees accomplished reflects the extraordinary talent, dedication and heart that makes New York such a special place. From the first days at emergency headquarters at P.S. 89, a few blocks from Ground Zero, where we all struggled to make sense of what needed to be done and to find ways to do what was necessary, to the final emotional days of the cleanup, DDC staff and other City employees exhibited a strength of character, determination, and sense of duty that is inspiring.

New York City can do extraordinary things - everyone involved - engineers and architects, surveyors, uniformed personnel, numerous diverse groups of City workers, Salvation Army and Red Cross volunteers, 9 private contractors and construction project managers, operating engineers, ironworkers and laborers - can be proud of what we all achieved together, possible only because we were united in a spirit of cooperation and resolve to get the job done.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States  
The Commission closed on August 21, 2004. This site is archived.