

# Introduction

The World Trade Center tragedy on September 11, 2001 was unparalleled in nature and magnitude. Never before had anyone intentionally flown commercial jetliners carrying thousands of gallons of fuel into a skyscraper. Never before had such buildings been so severely damaged by explosion and fire that they collapsed to the ground. Never before had a single terrorist act caused such a massive loss of life – 2,823 people in all. It was the worst terrorist attack in the history of terrorism.

In the aftermath of this extraordinary event, the enormous heroism of the members of the Fire Department of the City of New York stands out as an inspiration in the face of calamity. Three hundred forty-three FDNY personnel sacrificed their lives while trying to save others. They facilitated the safe evacuation of more than 25,000 people, the largest rescue operation in United States history.

This tragedy has reshaped our expectations about future threats and created a new urgency to increase preparedness. Many people believe that more large terrorist attacks on the United States are a certainty. The president and Congress are seeking to increase the nation's preparedness through a massive reorganization of homeland security agencies. The state, the city, and the FDNY must also take steps to prepare for the future.

At the Fire Department's request, McKinsey & Company spent five months working with Department personnel to develop recommendations for change to enhance the FDNY's preparedness. To do this, we studied the Department's response to the attack on September 11 in detail. Our goal was to learn from this incident and to define specific recommendations that the Department should implement. We did not attempt to reconstruct an exhaustive, minute-by-minute history of what the Department and its members did and did not do as they responded to the incident.

As our work progressed, we found many examples actions by FDNY personnel that saved lives, but we focused on identifying procedures, organization, and technology that should be improved to increase the Department's preparedness in the future.

Our team conducted more than 100 interviews with FDNY personnel who responded to the attack. We also examined the transcripts of hundreds more interviews that the Department conducted internally, and we reviewed a large number of dispatch records and about 60 hours of communications tapes. Throughout our effort, we had unfettered access to FDNY records and personnel, including the Fire Commissioner, his staff and all senior operations personnel. We spent more than 1,000 hours working closely with FDNY personnel who

responded to the World Trade Center attack, and with personnel who will be involved in implementing the recommendations of this report.

We also spoke with more than 100 experts in the United States and abroad, including those in other fire departments, emergency agencies and the military, as well as researchers and technology vendors. This helped us understand the diverse methods and best practices used around the world in responding to major disasters.

During the last three months of this effort, multiple FDNY task forces, involving about 50 Fire and EMS personnel (see Exhibit 1), joined us to develop detailed recommendations for change on a broad set of issues. Many of these recommendations were based directly on work and ideas that the FDNY developed. Even as this report was being prepared, several recommendations were already being implemented.

This report contains recommendations to the Fire Department in these key areas: operations, planning and management, communications and technology, and family and member support services. As background, the report also contains a description of the key events related to these areas during the Department's response to the attack on September 11.

The Fire Department now faces two major challenges: implementing the recommendations successfully and helping the city improve its inter-agency planning and coordination. Implementing these recommendations will bring about substantial change in the Department, requiring a renewed commitment to leadership, accountability, and discipline. But internal change is not enough. The FDNY and other government agencies must improve inter-agency planning and coordination if they are to fulfill their mission to protect the citizens of New York City. The last section of our report discusses this challenge.

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The response to the World Trade Center attack was tremendously complex. We hope that this report will help the Fire Department, the city and the country be better prepared should we ever be forced to face such a crisis again.