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Access Restrictions

The Closure of Ground Zero to Investigators

While the [steel was being removed](#) from the site of the three largest and most mysterious structural failures in history, even the team FEMA had assembled to investigate the failures -- the Building Performance Assessment Team (BPAT) -- was denied access to the evidence.¹ The Science Committee of the House of Representatives later identified several aspects of the FEMA-controlled operation that prevented the conduct of an adequate investigation:²

- The BPAT did not control the steel. "The lack of authority of investigators to impound pieces of steel for investigation before they were recycled led to the loss of important pieces of evidence."
- FEMA required BPAT members to sign confidentiality agreements that "frustrated the efforts of independent researchers to understand the collapse."
- The BPAT was not granted access to "pertinent building documents."
- "The BPAT team does not plan, nor does it have sufficient funding, to fully analyze the structural data it collected to determine the reasons for the collapse of the WTC buildings."

Gene Corley complained to the Committee that the Port Authority refused to give his investigators copies of the [Towers' blueprints](#) until he signed a waiver that the plans would not be used in a lawsuit against the agency.³

Bill Manning Condemns the "Half-Baked Farce"

Editor of *Fire Engineering Magazine* Bill Manning highlighted concerns among the firefighting community over the barring of investigators from the crime scene:

Fire Engineering has good reason to believe that the "official investigation" blessed by FEMA and run by the American Society of Civil Engineers is a half-baked farce that may already have been commandeered by political forces whose primary interests, to put it mildly, lie far afield of full disclosure. Except for the marginal benefit obtained from a three-day, visual walk-through of evidence sites conducted by ASCE investigation committee members- described by one close source as a "tourist trip"-no one's checking the evidence for anything.⁴

Manning also emphatically condemned the destruction of structural steel, declaring "The destruction and removal of evidence must stop immediately." Manning contrasted the operation to past disasters:

Did they throw away the locked doors from the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire? Did they throw away the gas can used at the Happyland Social Club Fire? Did they cast aside the pressure-regulating valves at the Meridian Plaza Fire? Of course not. But essentially, that's what they're doing at the World Trade Center.

Manning indicated that the destruction of the steel was illegal, based on his review of the national standard for fire investigation, NFPA 921, which provides no exemption to the requirement that evidence be saved in cases of fires in buildings over 10 stories tall.



Respected firefighting professionals have harshly criticized the destruction of evidence from the World Trade Center.

Calls for an independent investigation even came from politicians such as Senator Charles E. Schumer and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. Experts complained that the volunteer investigators selected by FEMA lacked financial support, staff support, and subpoena power. ⁵

No Photographs!

On September 26th, then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani banned photographs of Ground Zero. ⁶ An account by an anonymous photographer (AP), who took the photographs at the end of the [Ground Zero photographs](#) page, describes the treatment of this citizen investigator.

At the end of this return walk a NYC police officer asked to be shown authorization for taking photographs. AP said there was none. The officer asked how access to the site was gained. AP said I just walked in. Other police officers were consulted, several said this is a crime scene, no photographs allowed.

A NYC police captain was consulted who directed that AP be escorted from the site but that the digital photos need not be confiscated. The captain advised AP to apply for an official permit to photograph the site. [Share](#)

A NYC police officer took AP to New York State police officers nearby who asked to examine the digital camera and view the photographs. Without telling AP, who was being questioned by a State police officer, the photographs were deleted from the camera's compact flash memory chip by another State police officer.

AP was then escorted to the perimeter of the site by yet another NYC police officer who recorded AP's name, and who issued a warning to stay away from the site or face arrest.

References

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2. [HEARING CHARTER, Learning from 9/11: Understanding the Collapse of the World Trade Center, House Science Committee, 3/6/02 \[cached\]](#)
3. [WTC Probe Ills Bared, Daily News, 3/7/02 \[cached\]](#)
4. ['Burning Questions...Need Answers': FE's Bill Manning Calls for Comprehensive Investigation of WTC Collapse, FireEngineering, 1/4/02 \[cached\]](#)
5. [Experts Urging Broader Inquiry in Towers' Fall, New York Times, 12/25/01 \[cached\]](#)
6. [City: No more photographs of World Trade Center site, AP, 9/26/01 \[cached\]](#)