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Ground Zero

Talk of Rescue Used to Mask Destruction of Evidence

In the wake of the September 11th attack, the World Trade Center site was immediately dubbed Ground Zero, the term previously reserved for the central point of the destruction caused by the detonation of a nuclear weapon.



Aerial view of Ground Zero. See [photographs](#).

Indeed, many people observed that this new icon of American tragedy looked as if a bomb had gone off. Some observers pointed out that the way the Towers fell -- exploding out in all directions -- suggested that they had been destroyed with explosive charges, if not in exactly the same manner as conventional controlled demolitions. But, with the exception of some early [off-guard comments](#), the same media establishment that had christened the crime scene Ground Zero wouldn't whisper a word of such speculations. Could the term Ground Zero have been a ploy to cleverly mask the very phenomenon it had heretofore described?

For weeks, the story of Ground Zero told by television was all about the search for survivors. Yet the last three survivors -- [John McLoughlin](#), [William J. Jimeno](#), and Genelle Guzman-McMillan -- were pulled from the rubble within one day of the attack. As hopes faded, the real work at Ground Zero -- [the destruction of evidence](#) -- was gearing up to a phenomenal clip, the [infrastructure for removing the steel](#) having been put in place. Television specials on *PBS* and the *Discovery Channel* treated us to computer animations of falling trusses and an [MIT professor](#) comparing building structures to stacks of dominoes. Meanwhile the broadcast media appeared to be nearly perfectly free of any mention of the

obvious fact that the evidence of the three greatest structural failures in history (if you believe WTC 1, 2, and 7 crushed themselves) was being hauled away and melted down.

Originally the cost of the "cleanup" was pegged at \$7 billion. Later it was revised down to \$1 billion. ¹ The job that was expected to take well over a year had been finished in six months.

From Heroes to Landfill

As the "cleanup operation" geared up in late October of 2001, then Mayor Giuliani reduced the number of FDNY personnel allowed to do recovery work to a mere 24. Of the 343 firefighters killed in the attack, just 74 had been recovered. The Mayor's barricading of firefighters from Ground Zero came to a head on November 2, when altercations erupted during a protest march by firefighters. ² Union official Edward Burke said:

They'll be scooping up our fallen brothers, putting them in a dump truck, and taking them out to the landfill in Staten Island. I'll be damned if I'm going to go out with a rake to a garbage dump and try to find the bones and return them to their families. They deserve to be removed with dignity.

Calls to Stop the Destruction of Evidence

By early in 2002, many people had come to understand what was really happening at Ground Zero: the rapid destruction of the evidence of one of the largest crimes in history. There were many calls for an immediate halt to the removal and recycling of the steel from the World Trade Center, so that the disaster could be properly studied.

In an article published on January 3 of 2002, James Quintiere, a Professor of Fire Protection Engineering at the University of Maryland, pointed out that fires could not have destroyed Twin Towers and Building 7. He lamented the recycling of the evidence, and called for a genuine investigation. ³

In the January 2002 issue of *Fire Engineering Magazine*, editor Bill Manning published an scathing attack on the destruction of WTC evidence, "Selling Out the Investigation", in which he called FEMA's "official investigation" a "half-baked farce". ⁴

References

1. [Cleanup Crews Ahead of Schedule at WTC, DisasterRelief.org, 1/25/02 \[cached\]](#)
2. Face-off at Ground Zero, *BBC News*, 11/2/01 [\[cached\]](#)
3. [A Fire Prevention Engineer Asks: Why did the WTC Towers Fall?, Baltimore Sun, 1/3/02 \[cached\]](#)
4. [Selling Out the Investigation, Fire Engineering Magazine, \[cached\]](#)