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Officials warned 9/11 search too rushed

But complaints of recovery efforts at Ground Zero rebuffed, they say

By SARA KUGLER Associated Press

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NEW YORK - As the city agency overseeing the removal of the [World Trade Center](#) rubble was wrapping up its work in 2002, several officials handling the painstaking recovery of human remains warned things were moving too fast.

They believed that more pieces of the 2,749 dead could be found, and that the city shouldn't be rushing such an important task. But they were overruled, two of those officials told The Associated Press this week.

Over the past few days, dozens of bones have been discovered in underground passages at ground zero, more than five years after the tragedy.

"I knew that this was going to happen — they really just wanted us out of there," said retired Lt. John McArdle, the Police Department's ground zero commander. "There was not a good exit strategy for

some of these places, and if there was, it was poorly done."

A utility crew stumbled upon body parts last week in an abandoned manhole along the edge of the site, and forensic experts have since dug down and found more than 100 bones and fragments from skulls, ribs, arms, legs, feet and hands.

The discoveries have angered and saddened relatives of the Sept. 11 victims. Of the 2,749 people who were killed that day, the remains of some 1,150 have not been found. That means that families of 40 percent of the victims have nothing — not a sliver of a bone — left of their loved ones.

Kurt Horning, who [lost](#) his son Matthew in the attack, said Monday he was glad to hear others saying what families believed for years.

"The foot soldiers did everything they could, we know that — we have always felt this was a rush job by the administration and the suits," he said.

The notion that rescue workers were rebuffed by a city eager to finish the job could help shed light on why the remains are being discovered only now. The area where bones are being found is one where officials had raised objections.

The officials said they repeatedly aired their concerns to the agency in charge, the Department of Design and Construction, which was later praised for its speedy, under-budget cleanup of 1.5 million tons of trade center debris.

"The desire was driven by one thing, and that was, 'Get it done,' " said another official who protested, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Many a time, the issue was raised about how fast it was going and things were being missed."

Deputy [Mayor](#) Ed Skyler, who is overseeing the renewed search, said a review of such issues would be premature but noted that the Fire Department was designated as the [lead](#) agency for finding remains, and that DDC proceeded with its work only when the [FDNY](#) gave the go-ahead. The DDC had no comment.

According to the two officials, FDNY rescue workers were among those who resisted the DDC. However, Fire Department spokesman Frank Gribbon said Monday that reports of objections were exaggerated. Chief of Department Sal Cassano said in a statement that the FDNY "had final sign-off on areas where the recovery effort was deemed complete, and at no time was pressured to say otherwise."

Memos show that DDC acknowledged at least some of the objections in the spring of 2002, but was concerned about "delaying the sign-off."

After the twin, 110-story towers collapsed, police and fire officials led the backbreaking search for bodies while the DDC was assigned to excavate the debris, which stood 10 stories high at the start.

Each day, DDC convened planning meetings with all the parties involved, including engineers, emergency responders and a range of other city agencies.

The project finished months ahead of city officials' yearlong prediction, and cost about \$750 million — just a fraction of the initial multibillion-dollar estimate. But DDC was sometimes at odds with the rescue workers, who frequently needed to shut down or pause the operation as they recovered bodies.

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