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## **September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 World Trade Center Attacks: A Case Study**

**Introduction:** On the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, members of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda boarded two flights where they hijacked the airplanes and flew them into the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center in downtown Manhattan, New York. Approximately 2,700 people were killed by the attacks in New York.<sup>1</sup> The event led to a wide-scale re-examination of public safety and emergency preparedness across the globe.

**Facts of the Case:** On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, 19 individuals from the Islamic terrorist group Al-Qaeda boarded planes with the intent to hijack and destroy United States facilities and kill Americans. At 7:59am, five hijackers boarded American Airlines Flight 11 from Boston Logan Airport to Los Angeles, California.<sup>2</sup> At 8:15am, five other hijackers boarded United Airlines Flight 175 from Boston to also head to Los Angeles. Both flights were overtaken by the hijackers and diverted to New York City. Flight 11 crashed into the World Trade Center's North Tower at 8:46am, killing all 76 passengers, 11 crew members, and five Al-Qaeda members on board. At 9:03am, Flight 175 crashed into the World Trade Center's South Tower, killing all 53 passengers, six crew members, and the five hijackers on board. Separately, United Flight 93 from Newark, New Jersey, and American Airlines Flight 77 from Dulles, Virginia, were also hijacked. Flight 93 crashed into an empty field in Pennsylvania, and Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. All crew members, passengers, and hijackers were killed in these crashes. At 9:59am, the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed, and at 10:28am, the North Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed. During these events, thousands of people trapped inside the buildings were killed, including hundreds of police, firefighters, and other first responders. In the aftermath of the towers' collapse, lower Manhattan was coated with ash. In the days, weeks, months, and years that followed, thousands more individuals died as a result of injuries and illnesses obtained from their proximity to the World Trade Center attacks and building collapse that day.<sup>2</sup>

**Epidemiological Aspects:** The World Trade Center Health Registry was created in July 2002 to help cover medical treatments for individuals exposed to dust and hazardous materials throughout the crash sites.<sup>3</sup> The cleanup of the event took 10 months, with thousands of employees from multiple agencies throughout the country assisting in the effort and being exposed to harmful toxins throughout the process.<sup>4</sup> It is expected that the number of individuals who died from illnesses attributed to 9/11 will exceed the number of those who died on September 11<sup>th</sup>, with cancer rates of first responders up to 30% higher than the general public.<sup>5</sup>

**Management of the Event:** First responders immediately went to the site when the planes crashed into the World Trade Center and went inside to attempt to rescue those who may have been trapped. By 2:30pm, New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani visited Ground Zero, and by 8:30pm, President George W. Bush spoke to the nation on television.<sup>2</sup> The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) stated that the air near the World Trade Center was safe to breathe just days following the event.<sup>6</sup> The EPA's Office of the Inspector General reported two years later that they "did not have sufficient data and analyses to make such a blanket statement."<sup>6</sup>

**Communications of the Event:** The images of the World Trade Center being attacked were broadcast on national television, with footage of Flight 175 crashing into the South Tower captured and broadcast to a global audience. While Mayor Rudy Giuliani was able to be at Ground Zero, it took President Bush until nearly the end of the day to address the nation due to

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shortcomings in telecommunications equipment on board Air Force One. Landline phones were overwhelmed with callers attempting to get aid, while reports of radio failures among first responders were common.<sup>7</sup>

**Summary:** The events of 9/11 challenged national security, airport security, first responders, communication systems, and health organizations in their attempts to respond to a massive terrorist attack. Multiple reforms were born from the events of this day.

#### References:

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