

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Stephen M DeBlasio Sr., Director of Administration & Resource Planning
Division, Federal Emergency Management Agency(FEMA)

Type of event: Interview

Date: March 15, 2004

Special Access Issues: none

Prepared by: Jim Miller

Team Number: 8b

Location: FEMA Headquarters, 26 Federal Plaza, 13th floor, New York, NY

Participants - Non-Commission: Stephen M DeBlasio

Participants - Commission: Jim Miller, Mark Bittinger

On March 15, 2004 Stephen DeBlasio Sr was interviewed concerning his activities and observations as an employee of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) based on the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center disaster rescue and recovery operations. DeBlasio is the Director, Administration and Resource Planning Division for FEMA Region 11 and is the same position he held during the WTC disaster.

DeBlasio stated he was not in New York on September 11, 2001 but was on travel status with some of his senior logistic and IT staff members. They were in the Virgin Islands to attend a conference. He said when notified of the WTC disaster, he immediately set up communications through his location in the Virgin Islands. He could not contact FEMA Headquarters in New York because hard line and cell phone connections were either compromised or impossible to make a connection. He dispatched Shawn Matz and Arnold Davis, two of his staff members, who were traveling with him to return to states by a military junket. Anthony Perales and he stayed where they were since they had vital links to DC headquarters and Mount Weather.

DeBlasio stated his first order of business was to set up a site at Edison, NJ as a temporary FEMA Region 2 headquarters. This site was at Camp Kilmer, a US Army Reserve facility, where FEMA maintains space. He had 25 additional telephone lines installed by Verizon in addition to the 4 lines already in place. Additionally, the Edison site was originally planned so that the T1 line for the server was not connected to New York so the capability for computer usage had not been compromised. He advised he also set in motion the implementation of a Field Disaster Office (FDO) in Edison. This FDO would have been able to accommodate nearly 1000 people. Joe Spotter and Jason Wind were placed in charge of the Edison mobilization plan since they were already in New Jersey and New York at the time.

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DeBlasio said Perales, members of the Army Corp of Engineers and he left from the Virgin Islands on Wednesday afternoon. They arrived in Morristown NJ and made there way to the Edison facility. DeBlasio said on the way to Edison he became aware operations had been moved back to 26 Federal Plaza NY City, which is the official FEMA domicile. He said he did not have input into this decision and would have advised against the return to NY since communications were still out. He said the only communications link the office had been a microwave cellular system he had set up in the west side of the office. The reception was sporadic at best. Upon his return to NY DeBlasio took over the onsite logistics coordination from Rebecca (Pearson) Patrick, who had handled these matters while he was enroute.

DeBlasio advised his first order of business was to find available space to set up a DFO and space to support the Urban Search and Rescue (USR) teams which were dispatched to NY. Working with delegates of the Army Corp of Engineers, Forestry Service, GSA and FEMA on an Incident Management Team (IMT) space was procured at Pier 90, the Jacob Javits Center and Yale Building. By Thursday September 13, the leases had all been signed and by Friday each of the locations was operational. Pier 90, which DeBlasio described as having 80,000 square feet available was used as DFO and was set up to handle 1000 people. The Yale Building was used to warehouse caches of tools and supplies needed for such a massive operations. The space at the Jacob Javits Center was used for FEMA operations, as well as center of operations for USR, Mortuary and Medical Teams which had been sent to the disaster and the IMT

DeBlasio stated his primary concerns after these space were rented and became functional was to provide logistical support and to work on improving communications to include internet and email capabilities. He advised they were able to procure radios. Additionally, he was responsible for the procuring of generators, wood, tools, nails and equipment which could support the rescue and recovery efforts at the WTC. The Forestry Service contingent was used to inventory and control the warehousing of these items. DeBlasio explained the Forestry members have been involved, in a number of logistically challenging incidents, and have the skills to ensure inventory controls are in place. DeBlasio said there were no written protocols or standard operating procedures which he used to address these problems. He said this is what FEMA does-work on disasters. He stated through interfacing with other FEMA employees and his own experiences arising issues and problems were addressed and resolved.

During the rescue and recovery efforts at the WTC DeBlasio said he reported to Ted Manet, then Acting Regional Director of FEMA, Mike Byrne and Joe Piccianno. He stated these contacts were mostly verbal and in person contacts. He also advised he had personal contact with NY City Office of Emergency Management (OEM). He said NY OEM had leased space on Pier 92 right next to the FEMA DFO. He said at the time he was unaware that Region 1 (Boston) had taken over as the Regional Operations Center (ROC) for Region 2 (NY) since the NY office had no communications. He said his job as logistic coordinator was not impacted by the transfer of ROC to another region since he was in contact with his management structure and was working with the IMT.

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In addition to the ongoing communication problems which were caused by the WTC disaster DeBlasio encountered only one other problem. He stated the amount of donated goods was incredible. He said FEMA does not accept donated goods for a number of reasons. First, FEMA can not certify where these goods originated and if they were properly handled or stored. He said he realized most of these donations were given with the purest intentions but they caused problems. These goods were given to state and local authorities to handle as they saw fit. He did say on one occasion GSA rented space in Bayonne, NJ to store these donations based on what they believed was FEMA authorization. DeBlasio stated this caused a problem since FEMA policy was clear on the handling of donations. He said this caused a slight rift with GSA. He said he used this as an example of the number of issues which continually needed to be addressed over the course of the rescue and recovery efforts.

James Miller
9-11 Commission