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Report on 9/11 Finds Flaws In Response of Police Dept.

By WILLIAM K. RASHBAUM JULY 27, 2002

The New York Police Department's response to the Sept. 11 attack was effective in many areas but suffered from lapses in leadership and coordination and a lack of proper planning and training, according to a draft report by an independent consultant for the department.

The frank assessment by the consultant, McKinsey & Company, said that many officers did not know who was in charge or whom they should report to after the attack. It also said that some officers in the field acted without direction from field commanders.

The report also found that before Sept. 11, the department's disaster plans in large measure failed to take into account a possible terrorist attack, that the police performed few large-scale drills and simulations, and that senior leaders received little disaster-response training.

The report, however, is measured in its findings, noting that no one could have anticipated Sept. 11 and that the department performed many tasks admirably. While leadership lapses, ineffective planning and a lack of coordination at the scene were among the most serious flaws, they did not affect what many considered to be

the department's primary goal that day: the effective evacuation of the World Trade Center, saving thousands of lives.

Still, the draft is unblinking in its assessment of the lapses that day. While providing few details or examples, it concluded that the response suffered from a "perceived lack of a single strong operational leader" and "unclear roles and responsibilities among some senior leadership."

Those conclusions were based in part on interviews with more than 100 department commanders and officers, a survey of 700 more officers of varying ranks and a review of documents, including internal reports and radio transmissions. In its survey, the consultants found, for example, that 38 percent of officers who went to Lower Manhattan said that they were unsure to whom they should report.

But the 88-page draft, a copy of which was obtained by The New York Times, does not single out any individual police official for praise or criticism. It was based on four months of research by the consulting firm, which traditionally reviews management practices. The company is performing a similar review for the Fire Department.

Even as it addressed flaws -- what it called shortfalls -- the report noted the heroic performance of so many officers and the department's own sacrifices. "Twenty-three members of the N.Y.P.D. gave their own lives on that day," the report said. "Nothing in this report is intended to detract from the courageous actions."

Deputy Commissioner Michael P. O'Looney, the department's chief spokesman, refused to discuss the report, which is expected to be released next week by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly. Top department officials and key mayoral aides have already been briefed on the report's conclusions.

"The mayor is traveling, and we don't have a comment," said William Cunningham, Mr. Bloomberg's director of communications.

A spokeswoman for former Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, Sunny Mindel, also declined comment on his behalf. "We can't respond to a report that we have not seen

that was leaked to The New York Times," she said.

Last night, Bernard B. Kerik, who was police commissioner at the time of the attack and served until the end of Mr. Giuliani's term on Dec. 31, could not be reached for comment. But one senior police official who was involved in the response played down the criticism in the report. "Every day police officers are faced with unimaginable situations, and every day they adapt and survive and do their jobs," he said. Noting that 25 percent of the officers queried in the report were unsatisfied with their supervision that day, the official said that on most days, more than half of the department's officers would say the same thing.

Billed as a forward-looking report, the document is filled with recommendations on how the department could improve its response to a future event of this scope. Officers should be directed to staging areas instead of flooding the scene itself, the report said. More expansive and frequent emergency drills should be undertaken to prepare for the next major catastrophe and better analysis should be performed afterward.

Reserve officers should be held in check in case of a secondary attack, and the department needs to have greater coordination with other agencies like the Fire Department and federal and state authorities, the report said.

Analysts have noted that fire and police commanders barely spoke that day to share information or coordinate strategy. Many of the firefighters who died in the collapse of the second tower were unaware that the first tower had fallen, according to interviews. "Solving all internal improvement opportunities will not, by itself, be enough," the report said.

Despite what it called the perceived lack of a strong commander and confusion among some top officials, the report found overall that the department acted effectively in 10 of what it described as the 16 critical tasks, including the rescue of civilians, the evacuation of Lower Manhattan, traffic management, and the protection of sensitive locations around the city.

It also said the police radio system performed well, although some officials relied too heavily on cellphones, which the attack knocked out.

At the same time it found what it termed shortfalls in the search for and rescue of survivors after the collapse, assessing the potential risks of hazardous materials at the trade center site and possible secondary attacks, policing the disaster scene, and, perhaps most significantly, assessing and preventing further terrorist threats to the city.

The report also found that field commanders underused the department's command center at 1 Police Plaza and could not sufficiently deploy officers.

While the report said the department performed the pre-collapse rescue and evacuation effectively, it said the post-collapse search for survivors "proved extremely risky given the lack of equipment, training and supervision" among the responders. It also found that intelligence efforts were not well coordinated. There was "no central point for collation and systemic analysis of information regarding the incident, with leaders acting largely on personal observations."

The second half of the report chronicles the perceptions of the officers interviewed or surveyed about how the department responded or should improve. Nearly half, for example, said they would like better rescue and evacuation training. Only 20 percent said they felt confident that the department had developed adequate plans to respond to emergencies. The rest of those polled said they either lacked such confidence or did not have an opinion.

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