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► BUILDINGS

Volunteers Sought to Inspect WTC Steel

(10/25/01)

By *Nadine M. Post*

The new president of the Structural Engineers Association of New York (SEAoNY) issued a call for volunteers to form a rotation at the two scrap yards in New Jersey receiving steel from the World Trade Center's twin 110-story towers. The purpose is to assist the American Society of Civil Engineer's WTC Building Performance Study Team in its search for steel from the floors that the airplanes hit and the steel that was subsequently fire-damaged.

A group of ASCE-team engineers spent a couple of recently—during the team's first field trip to New York City—at the salvage yards. "We were crawling through steel" but did not find any pieces from the impact or fire area, said Edward M. DePaola, SEAoNY's president and a principal of Severud Associates, New York City, at SEAoNY's annual meeting in New York City, Oct. 24.

DePaola announced that SEAoNY has joined the ASCE team studying the failure mode of the trade center buildings and the performance of others that were affected by the collapses, along with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, National Fire Protection Association, American Institute of Steel Construction and other organizations.

Saw-Teen See, the managing principal at Leslie E. Robertson Associates, one of the successor firms of the WTC's structural engineer of record, provided information to the study team, of which she is a member, on markings that identify the steel for those areas under scrutiny, said DePaola. Each piece of steel in the towers was stamped with its location in the building, he added. The team knows the impact floors, so the goal is to find the marking on the steel for that area, he added.

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DePaola is trying to set up a continuous rotation for two months at the two salvage yards so that engineers can examine the steel before it is cut into 1-ton pieces and sent off for recycling.

SEAO NY organized its members who served as volunteers to aid the rescue and recovery effort in assessing the structural stability of the debris, shoring safe routes for equipment and assessing damage to some 400 area buildings. The SEAO NY teams are under the direction of LZA/Thornton-Tomasetti, the New York City-based structural engineer in charge of the effort for the city's Dept. of Design and Construction.

"We learned that the angle of repose of rubble is 127°," said W. Richard Mahoney, SEAO NY's outgoing president and chief of the structures division for M.G. McLaren, West Nyack, N.Y.

DePaola said the third structural assessment survey of the buildings surrounding Ground Zero is complete. The only change is that the damaged Winter Garden at the World Financial Center has been switched from red to blue, meaning that it can be salvaged. He also reported that the city has reduced the size of the cordoned-off zone around the WTC site and that many of the yellow-tagged buildings—those with the least amount of damage—are being "handed" back to their owners.

DePaola also asked the nearly 140 structural engineers at the meeting, many of whom were among the 400-plus volunteers at the site, for any photographs they took of the debris pile or observations they made during their shifts at Ground Zero. He asked for similar information on the buildings still standing around Ground Zero, also under study.

Currently at Ground Zero, SEAO NY has two teams of a pair of engineers, each working a 12-hour shift, assisting the contractors with structural concerns about equipment placement and other issues affecting debris removal. That is down from four teams of four engineers each, also around the clock, in the days immediately following the terrorist attacks.

To better prepare to assist authorities in future terrorist attacks and other emergencies, SEAO NY has worked out a plan to get its engineer-members trained by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. "Most structural engineers do not learn about fire damage [in school]," said DePaola. But at Ground Zero, engineers were being asked by the fire department whether it was safe to go under "teetering and tottering" steel, some of which had been damaged by fire. "There are FEMA classes for this," he said.

He also said that SEAO NY has made contact with the city authorities to work out protocols for assistance in future emergencies, as volunteers. A draft memo of understanding is being crafted that will "talk about our preparedness and provide contacts in the event of future emergencies," he said, adding he is not talking about a scaffold collapse, but an "event" that requires more engineers to assist than the

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