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Fire, Not Extra Explosives, Doomed Buildings, Expert Says

By John Fleck
Journal Staff Writer

A New Mexico explosives expert says he now believes there were no explosives in the World Trade Center towers, contrary to comments he made the day of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack.

"Certainly the fire is what caused the building to fail," said Van Romero, a vice president at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology.

The day of the attack, Romero told the Journal the towers' collapse, as seen in news videotapes, looked as though it had been triggered by carefully placed explosives.

Subsequent conversations with structural engineers and more detailed looks at the tape have led Romero to a different conclusion.

Romero supports other experts, who have said the intense heat of the jet fuel fires weakened the skyscrapers' steel structural beams to the point that they gave way under the weight of the floors above.

That set off a chain reaction, as upper floors pancaked onto lower ones.

Romero said he believes still it is possible that the final collapse of each building was triggered by a sudden pressure pulse caused when the fire reached an electrical transformer or other source of combustion within the building.

But he said he now believes explosives would not have been needed to create the collapse seen in video images.

Conspiracy theorists have seized on Romero's comments as evidence for their argument that someone else, possibly the U.S. government, was behind the attack on the Trade Center.

Romero said he has been bombarded with electronic mail from the conspiracy theorists.

"I'm very upset about that," he said. "I'm not trying to say anything did or didn't happen."

BELOW IS THE ORIGINAL STORY AS IT APPEARED ON SEPT. 11, 2001

hours after the attack
Explosives Planted In Towers, N.M. Tech Expert Says

By Olivier Uyttebrouck
Journal Staff Writer

Television images of the attacks on the World Trade Center suggest that explosives devices caused the collapse of both towers, a New Mexico Tech explosion expert said Tuesday.

The collapse of the buildings appears "too methodical" to be a chance result of airplanes colliding with the structures, said Van Romero, vice president for research at New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology.

"My opinion is, based on the videotapes, that after the airplanes hit the World Trade Center there were some explosive devices inside the buildings that caused the towers to collapse," Romero said.

Romero is a former director of the Energetic Materials Research and Testing Center at Tech, which studies explosive materials and the effects of explosions on buildings, aircraft and other structures.

Romero said he based his opinion on video aired on national television broadcasts.

Romero said the collapse of the structures resembled those of controlled implosions used to demolish old structures.

"It would be difficult for something from the plane to trigger an event like that," Romero said in a phone interview from Washington, D.C.

Romero said he and another Tech administrator were on a Washington-area subway when an airplane struck the Pentagon.

He said he and Denny Peterson, vice president for administration and finance, were en route to an office building near the Pentagon to discuss defense-funded research programs at Tech.

If explosions did cause the towers to collapse, the detonations could have been caused by a small amount of explosive, he said.

"It could have been a relatively small amount of explosives placed in strategic points," Romero said. The explosives likely would have been put in more than two points in each of the towers, he said.

The detonation of bombs within the towers is consistent with a common terrorist strategy, Romero said.

"One of the things terrorist events are noted for is a diversionary attack and secondary device," Romero said.

Attackers detonate an initial, diversionary explosion that attracts emergency personnel to the scene, then detonate a second explosion, he said.

Romero said that if his scenario is correct, the diversionary attack would have been the collision of the planes into the towers.

Tech President Dan Lopez said Tuesday that Tech had not been asked to take part in the investigation into the attacks. Tech often assists in forensic investigations into terrorist attacks, often by setting off similar explosions and studying the effects.