

Alameda County Fire Department NEWS

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*CA Fire Chiefs Association President Sheldon Gilbert & CA Police Chiefs Association President
Issue Joint Editorial to Reflect on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11: "We're on Our Way"*

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and
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Minutes before one of the World Trade Center towers collapsed around them, two firefighters from the initial wave to arrive on the scene exchanged the following over their walkie-talkies:

"Chief, what stair you in?"

"South stairway Adam, South Tower."

"Floor 78?"

"Ten-four, numerous civilians, we're gonna need two engines up here."

"All right, ten-four, we're on our way."

"We're on our way." Simple, direct, powerful. To me, those four little words speak volumes about the extraordinary heroism, bravery and determination demonstrated by the hundreds of police officers and firefighters who rushed into the chaos on September 11, 2001. Knowing the situation was bad - but amidst the panic and confusion, not fully aware of its enormity - they did what they were sworn to do: Get on their way as quickly as possible to reach those who needed their help.

That they did so without hesitation - and that firefighters and police officers in cities across our nation continue to do so every day - at tremendous personal risk, commands our unending respect, admiration and gratitude.

While it has been 10 years since "the day that changed everything," the raw emotions that images and transcripts of 9-11 still bring to the surface make it seem like it was just yesterday. For those of us in public safety, it might as well have been, because we will never forget the enormous personal sacrifices our colleagues made that terrible morning.

New York City lost many, many lives that day: more than 2,800 in total, including 343 firefighters and 72 peace officers. A few days ago, as we reflected on their courage in the face of the worst terrorist attack ever on American soil, we came across a quote from the widow of Battalion Chief Orio J. Palmer. Up until the very moment the tower came crashing down around him, Chief Palmer was organizing the evacuation of those injured by the airplane's devastating impact.

After listening to an audiotape of her husband's heroic efforts that was released in 2002, Mrs. Palmer said: "I didn't hear fear, I didn't hear panic. When the tape is made public to the world, people will hear that they all went about their jobs without fear, and selflessly."

In the decade since 9-11, police departments, fire departments and other public-safety agencies throughout America have worked closely with county, state and federal departments, locally implementing policies and procedures that were enacted following creation of the Department of Homeland Security. Guided by our goal of enhancing public safety, we've focused our efforts on preventing terrorist attacks against vulnerable targets, and prepared rapid, coordinated, effective responses if and when an attack occurs.

While the terrorist attacks ushered in changes in the way public safety agencies operate, those changes were all based on something that will never change: our steadfast commitment to ensuring the safety of the citizens we are sworn to serve and protect.

As we observe the 10th anniversary of 9-11, it is with solemn reverence and gratitude to the fallen heroes who gave everything that September morning. Inspired by their sacrifices, we will echo their promise when called to duty:

"We're on our way."

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