

October 14, 2013

**An Important note from the Principal Investigator Abolhassan ASTANEH-ASL, on the document that follows:**

This is a paper I wrote in 2002 suggesting to have a special day every year , called “9/11 Day” to honor first responders and to assess our readiness to protect public against terrorist attacks.

Respectfully,

Abolhassan ASTANEH-ASL, Ph.D., P.E.

Professor and P.I. for the NSF Funded UC Berkeley WTC Project

# A Suggestion to have a “9/11 Day”

By

Abolhassan Astaneh-Asl

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An area of research that I have been involved over the last 20 years or so is investigation of damage to and collapse of structures due to major earthquakes. After the 9/11 terrorist attack, I started investigating the collapse of the World Trade Center which still continues. Since , the structural investigation has to be done as soon as possible and before the valuable data are lost, in most cases, we structural investigators arrive at the site of devastation with or just after the “first responders” I define first responders those who are part of 911 team. This includes firefighters, rescue and recovery personnel, police, medical response team members and others who arrive at the site to rescue injured and recover bodies of those who have perished. Because of being with them at the site, for years I have witnessed many heroic acts by these first responders to literally pull survivors out of the rubble and save them. I have seen these heroic acts throughout the world including in the aftermath of Mexico-City quake of 1985 ( more than 10,000 perished), Loma Prieta quake of Northern California of 1989 (68 perished), Iran quake of 1990 (more than 20,000 perished), Northridge LA quake of 1994 (.... Perished) and Kobe Japan quake of 1995 (more than 6,000 perished). In some developing countries, first responders were working literally with their hands and picks and shovels to remove the earth while in others such as US and Japan, giant machinery were moving the earth, but in all cases, the first responders were the ones that were putting their own lives at great risk to save others. And , I was all along, a close witness to these acts admiring their courage and appreciating their work privately. Until, there came the tragic day of September 11, 2001. A few days after the collapse, using a research grant from the National Science Foundation I flew to NYC and started collecting perishable data and investigating the collapse. Again, I ended up witnessing the first responders from close distance. But, this was not like earthquakes. This was a case that actually hundreds of first responders have also perished while trying to rescue others. When I visited Ground Zero the first time on September 19<sup>th</sup>, the scene was horrifying, but, the first responders were still doing the same thing, taking great risk and putting their lives at risk to save others who might have been still alive under the rubble. This time, I ended up staying in Tribeca hotel which was practically occupied by first responders and Justice Department investigators looking into criminal aspects of the terrorist attacks. This time, I ended up living with first responders not just working alongside them. I truly witnessed heroism. Of course all of us saw how heroically they tried to save lives on September 11 before the collapse of towers resulted in their own deaths. Recently, President Ford in a speech while referring to heroes of 9/11 defined the heroes as those who have bravery and leadership and sacrifice themselves for others. I felt all these people satisfy definition of heroes. As a nation, we have always honored our heroes. Every year on Memorial Day, President’s Day and Martin Luther King Day we honor our military personnel, presidents and civil rights leaders for their heroism. But, when do we honor our heroes within the first responders? I have witnessed their heroism for many years and would like to propose that we designate the September 11 of each year as the “911-Day”. This special day does not need to be a holiday. But a day in every year set aside primarily:

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1. To remember, pay tribute and honor those first responders who have lost their lives to save others throughout the country and in all local communities.
2. To remember those who have lost their lives due to a natural disaster, an accident or a crime that involved first responders.
3. To provide an opportunity for general public to say thanks to their local and national first responders and show their appreciation of first responders' work. Open houses in fire stations, police stations and other emergency response agencies can be held on 911-Day and people can visit their local agencies, get to know their first responders as well as provide support to them.
4. To conduct educational and training programs to educate students at all levels as well as general public on safe-evacuation and how they can help first-responders in case of a major disaster such as 9/11. The education can emphasize how they can protect themselves against natural hazards, accidents and criminal actions and how they can survive such calamities.
5. To have an opportunity at a certain time of the year ( the 911-Day) to review the budget, human resources, equipment , training of the first responders to ensure their adequacy and if needed develop and implement plans to remedy any inadequacies.

Having the “911-Day” will undoubtedly strengthen and protect us against future disasters, fires and criminal acts and in my mind undoubtedly will reduce the casualties of such acts. Establishing 911-Day will undoubtedly be a great tribute and one of the best and ever-lasting memorials for not only for the victims and first responders who so tragically lost their lives on 9/11 but to all victims and first-responders of such tragic events everywhere.